

# Berk's Code of Fanfiction

by Astrid Goes For A Spin

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Summary: CO-AUTHORED by WORDWIELDER! After the distressing event of finding their whole lives documented in something called "fanfiction," the gang has decided there's only one thing to do, and Berk becomes home to the very first Fanfiction Academy in the Barbaric Archipelago... CO-AUTHORED by WORDWIELDER!

## 1. In Which The Inciting Incident Occurs

Ummm, hello. Hello! I guess we should start with the obvious...I should be working on DK. It's a known fact. BUT! This was **\*\*co-authored\*\*** by the AMAZING Wordwielder (I've been a fan for a very long time) as we've been planning to do a FANFICTION ACADEMY story! You may notice some similarities between this and other fanfiction universities, but as this is located on the lovely Isle of Berk, I'm afraid the similarity ends there. I hope you believe that this is worth it. And now, a word from my compatriot:

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**\*\*If any Oh, Gods fans are out there, ready to hunt me down for promising this story soon, I'M SORRY. Every bit of the delay on this is mine, not the lovely Astrid. We're actually a pretty great team, though. Thoughts? Sharing? Please? Reviews may be answered by me or Astrid, depending on who you want/follow. \*\***

\* \* \*

><p>"It's not gonna go away, is it?" Tuffnut groaned, pushing his face into the table.<p>

"I'm gonna smash their faces," Ruff agreed, banging a fist against Tuff. "Hey, Hiccup. Are you finished with the applications yet?"

Hiccup was seated in the library, yards of paperwork surrounding him.

He had a pencil sticking out of his flying harness and smudges all over his arm. Astrid was curled up in a ball a few feet from him, hiding her face, and Fishlegs was cowering behind his own piles of paper.

"If you guys would help me, maybe we'd finish quicker," Hiccup said, yanking his spare pencil from its holster and upsetting half the things around him as he scrambled to grab it.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Hey, guys!" Snotlout burst through the doors, looking a little singed around the edges. "Hiccup â€" your dad finally gave us permission to use the ring for the classrooms. He says we can use the cages for the dormitories."

"Rightâ€"|"

"Or a few of the houses."

"Hmm." Hiccup pulled himself up. "Do we want them to feel at home â€"|.?"

"No!" Fishlegs finally looked up. "No, no, no, no, no, no! The bad ones go in the cages! We can't let our guard down! The good ones get the houses." He glanced to either side warily.

"Just not mine," Tuffnut added.

"Guys," Hiccup explained patiently. "We sorted through all the fanfiction writers. All the good ones get to stay home and enjoy their lives. The others are going to be transported here â€" tomorrow. Legs, Lout, that means that all the ones coming are the bad ones."

Astrid shuddered. "And you seriously think it's a good idea to give them â€" weapons?"

"And dragons?"

"Yes," said Hiccup, far too calmly. "We want nice, accurate fanfiction, don't we? The fangirls and fanboys have to learn how difficult it is to master a weapon-

Ruffnut laughed. "Or even hold oneâ€"|"

"Right," continued Hiccup. "And how hard it is to ride a dragon, let alone get along with some of them. Especially since half of these people think there're thousands of magical dragon species out thereâ€"|"

"Makes sense," Astrid agreed. "In a dangerous kind of way."

"Seriously," Hiccup said. "Are you afraid of them? How many years we waited to fight dragons, and you don't think you can handle a few weak little non-Viking humans?"

"He's got a point," Snotlout admitted. "I mean, we are a lot tougher than them."

"Plus," Hiccup smirked. "We actually have dragons. And control over them. And Toothless."

Toothless flicked an ear in agreement. Despite the "taming" of him, not a lot of people had forgotten how "Night Fury! Get Down!" used to be the village motto.

"I think Astrid and Toothless are perfectly good security," Hiccup explained. "And besides. It's our village." He rolled his eyes. "Who do you think the hundreds of Vikings are going to side with: them, or us?"

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One thousand years into the future and another thousand miles away, a future victim who was also a recent perpetrator sat at her laptop. Marcie Brant was a fairly normal girl: average height, average weight, average brown hair and average hazel eyes. The single factor that made her unaverage (to a certain six offended Vikings) was up on her computer screen now.

Marcy Brant, or MarciliciousSiriusBlack (her penname), had a weakness for Mary Sues, and even more horrifying, their dragons. Right now she was happily writing Toothless a White Fury mate, and vaguely contemplating Silverwing's rider, who would, she decided, have silver hair. How would Hiccup feel about her, and furthermore, how would \_Astrid...?\_

Giddily, she pressed save on her Word document, and that's when all Hel broke loose.

A flash of light, a burst of wind, and a long, terrifying fall deposited Marcie Brant on a rocky, mossy shore. "Ohhhhhhhh," she muttered. "I'm never doing that to a character again, that HURT." Her fingers brushed the knot on her head and she winced. "Never again. Owwwwwww."

Speaking of characters...this wasn't...it couldn't be...she must be hallucinating...it simply \_looked\_ like Berk...but that deep, bone-penetrating, damp cold...she couldn't be imagining...

"Good," said a callously satisfied voice she was positive she recognized. "Then this might be easier than we thought."

Marcie Brant looked at Astrid Hofferson, who was smiling sweetly and carelessly flipping an axe. She made a small noise of surprise and stared at her before her stomach swooped, her eyes fluttered closed and she hit the rocks again.

"Or not," Hiccup said wryly, limping up to stand beside Astrid. "Is she okay-? Astrid! I told you no weapons; they'll be terrified enough as it is!"

"Oh, stop babying them," Astrid said dismissively. "They can't handle an \_axe\_, how will they handle Toothless?" She rolled her eyes.

"Oh, you mean my dragon who \_I\_ told to stay behind?" Hiccup asked. He went over to the girl and fumbled for her pulse, grimacing. "Yeah, she's gonna be out for a while." His diagnosis was interrupted by

another body falling viciously to the ground.

With a small cry, he jerked backward, barely avoiding the boy facedown at his feet. "Another one?"

"DUCK!"

Astrid leaped forward, grabbing Hiccup's wrist and towing him off the rocky beach, setting off at a stumbling run for the cover of the trees. From there, shielding their heads, they watched as dozens - \_hundreds\_ - (maybe even thousands) of people, ranging in age from around nine to fifty dropped to the ground in what looked like a highly painful way.

Finally, they stopped falling. Astrid looked over at Hiccup, who was still clutching her wrist, gasping.

"Wow. That's a lot more than I planned on."

It was pathetic, but by now she was so used to Hiccup having some brilliant and completely mad plan, it was unnerving to hear him admit, albeit nonchalantly, that he \_hadn't\_ \_planned\_ for something. "Eh, those are big cages," she said airily.

"We're not making them sleep in cages," Hiccup said, half-exasperated and half-amused. "We're trying to teach them, not punish them."

Astrid shrugged. "Teach, punish, it's all the same." She grinned at him sideways. "Oh, come on. Like you haven't thought about it at least \_once-\_"

Hiccup chuckled before adding more seriously, "We should probably at least attempt to move them. We don't need them to all get pneumonia and die. I don't think the sponsors got them to sign waivers."

Astrid raised her eyebrows. "'We?' Are you included in that statement? I'm pretty sure you'd drop them. Ninety pounds, remember?"

Hiccup threw up his hands. "What does a guy have to do to end the 'ninety pounds' jokes! And it's ninety-five actually." He eyed a slumped mass on the ground, a guilty look creeping into his eyes. "They're all writers; I hope they appreciate the irony."

Astrid turned to him, thinking that if she woke up with a massive knot on her head, she probably wouldn't appreciate the irony. Then, she didn't spend her free time plotting fanfiction, especially fanfiction that disgusted its subjects (sometimes to the point of physical illness), so her mental processes probably didn't compare to that of a typical fanfic writer. "Should I get reinforcements?" she asked.

Hiccup nodded. "The biggest ones you can find. I'll keep watch on..." his voice trailed off. "These."

Astrid strode off in that confident, Viking-y way she would always have, swinging her axe. That axe still made Hiccup feel like he should learn how to hold a shield properly...which would probably be

necessary to teach the writers. He sat and tried to make himself comfortable on the intensely uncomfortable ground, and promptly fell over after leaning back too far; he had forgotten that Toothless wasn't lounging behind him. "Owww," he muttered. "Maybe the drop was a little cruel." He pulled himself back up, still rubbing the back of his head where a particularly sharp rock had taken revenge upon him.

"Oh my God," came a faint, girlish voice. "Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III?"

Hiccup squinted to find the voice's source. A girl, probably two or three years younger than him, with shockingly bright pink hair like he had never seen or even imagined, was leaning against a boulder and staring at him.

"Wow, full name," Hiccup replied. "At your service." He stepped over the bodies to reach the girl, whose eyes widened to a frighteningly round degree as he approached.

"How hard did I hit my head?" she wondered.

He reached out to help her up and she seized his hand. "You \_feel \_real," she said cautiously.

"As far as I know, I am," he replied. She allowed him to help her to her feet, and he hastily shook his fingers from her increasingly painful grip.

"Am I on Berk?" she said, bewildered. "Is that possible?"

"Yes."

"To both?"

Hiccup nodded. "Yep. Welcome to Berk. Sorry it's so cold, it kind of always is. We're a few degrees short of-"

"Freezing to death," she finished breathlessly. "I know...I'm Penelope."

"Penname?" Hiccup asked, fearing the answer.

"PinkHeart094456732," she supplied. "Why do you...? Is this...?"

"Essentially, fanfiction training," Hiccup answered automatically. He expected to be asked this question several hundred times...or several thousand, judging by the quantity of unconscious offenders.

"I do not believe it. I'm in fanfiction rehab." She snorted. "Why not?" She winced. "Jesus Christ in \_Heaven\_, my head is killing me."

"Er, sorry about that," Hiccup apologized. "We really had no other w-uh. Well. I can get you some tea for that-"

"Ooooh, Gothi?" She prodded her head and cringed. "That sounds nice. What am I here for?"

Hiccup paused, weighing his words. "Think about everything you've posted on fanfiction."

A stricken expression passed over her face.

"It was only one fic!" she burst out.

But at least, Hiccup thought wearily while guiding her up the bluff, she didn't faint.

## 2. In Which The Twins Threaten Violence

**\*\*I hope you forgive me, because I have pumped out so much in the last week I'm almost dizzy of it. Plus, I updated Dragon Keeper recently and am 1,485 words into the next chapter. (This is when I take my bow.) Make way for a little bit of humor, as this story is strictly that. And now a word from Wordwielder. :)\*\***

**\*\*Hello, fanfictioneers. Everyone clap for Astrid and my effort. This thing is a mammoth of a chapter [Astrid: It did take forever.]-literally over 3,000 words. Next chapter we will finally start instruction. Every chapter we post I get really excited for the next. And now over to the other half of the Dynamic Duo.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>As it turned out, a whole whopping <em>ton<em> of them got pneumonia.

It wasn't pretty. The tiny Isle of Berk was not the best place in the Barbaric Archipelago to drop a few thousand people on at any time, necessitating some very hasty peace-treating (to the intense displeasure of Stoick the Vast) with their closest neighbors in order to relieve the very cramped village. Anyone who ventured near the Haddock house could hear Stoick groaning that the Meatheads were going to be reminding the Berkians of the favor for the next hundred years.

And, predictably, it was up to Hiccup to sort through the fainting, vomiting, sweating, coughing, and shaking fanfiction writers to keep the worst of them on Berk.

Luckily, Vikings didn't get sick.

But Hiccup did.

At least every house had three or four writers sleeping on the floor, and the only families spared were that of his friends, in response to an actually surprising reaction from the writer population as a whole.

Hiccup had lead 'Penelope,' â€" (what a strange name - but, then again, they were all weird) â€" into the village and attempted to settle her on the first floor of his house.

This was only the first step. The rest of the village had tromped out to the rocks to help Astrid and the others lug the victims â€" uh, students â€" to the houses. Once several of them had become

conscious and conscious of the fact that Hiccup had selected a 'favorite' and was letting her stay in his houseâ€|

It had all gone downhill from there. Name-calling was the least of it, and it was only after several (dozen) black eyes and broken teeth that they'd been subdued.

Muttering furiously under his breath, Hiccup wiped his runny nose on his sleeve yet again, hoping fervently that its redness would do something to turn away the legion of his admirers. No such luck.

He stopped cautiously at the door to Gothi's house, waiting for the okay to come in. "Oh, come on," he moaned, resting a freezing hand on Toothless' warm neck. "Just let me in alreadyâ€|"

He rubbed the other hand against his shirt, trying in vain to bring some blood back to his white fingertips. When Hiccup got sick, he usually didn't have the patience to lie down and recover quickly, but then again, no Viking did. So he was up and about, slightly dizzy, coughing sporadically, and feeling generally miserable.

This particular emotion was not diminished by the fact that a disturbing amount of fangirls had managed to escape from their guards â€" um, hosts - to seek him out â€" even a few fully grown women.

Hiccup was reminded unpleasantly of this as the door finally swung open and Hiccup stepped inside gratefully, gazing at the rows of people huddled on the floor. "Thank you," he said emphatically. The little woman nodded, gesturing him inside with a sour expression. "You'll still make me some of that knot root tea, right?"

She nodded grudgingly, gesturing to the simmering pot on the stove. "Thanks, Elder."

Swallowing nervously, Hiccup looked at the first one he reached (in fact, nearly fell over), crouching down next to her. She was a girl with short, chin-length black hair and attentive brown eyes, which fluttered open as she choked, "Hi- \_Hiccup\_?"

"Yeah, that's me," Hiccup repeated for what felt like the billionth time. "And you are - ?"

"\_Hiccup is my BFF\_," she said, obviously in rapture. Slightly stunned, Hiccup sat back on his heel, blinking at her and feeling his nose slowly drip.

"Umm, okay, I'm just going to â€" um, yeah." Completely bemused and beginning to become slightly scared, Hiccup rose, already eyeing the next in the row, a boy who was looking more than a little delirious â€" when a hand shot out and grabbed his wrist, towing him back to the floor.

"Whoa!"

On hands and knees, Hiccup looked up and found the brown-eyed girl's face to be less than an inch from his own. "Hey! What do you think you're d-OING?!" But it was too late. She lunged, planting a not-that-quick kiss on the end of Hiccup's sadly not non-attractive enough nose.

He wiped it off, standing as quickly as he could. "You know, Toothless, I think Astrid can handle this groupâ€|"

And that's when the fainting started.

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When Hiccup came to, he was in bed. Fire flickered beyond his closed lids, and suddenly a shadow eclipsed the warmth bathing his face.

"Hey, bud." Opening his eyes wearily, Hiccup reached up to scratch Toothless, who butted him gently with his head. "Yeah, I'm okay." Rubbing his head, Hiccup sat slowly up on the edge of the bed, feeling it spin. "Uck. What happened?"

"You passed out."

"Wha â€" \_oh\_." Clutching at his chest, Hiccup tried to reign in his nerves. Snotlout was sitting in a chair opposite his bed, playing with one of his paintbrushes.

"Hey, what are you do-"

"Is Hiccup awake?"

Completely puzzled, Hiccup grabbed Toothless by the neck and moved to the edge of the loft. Astrid was lounging in his father's throne, staring lazily into the fire as she sharpened her axe. Tuff was lying on top a nearby beam, Ruffnut throwing small pebbles at him from a pile she'd amassed on the floor. Part of him wondered where she had even found such a collection, but no doubt asking such a question would lead to a long and confounding explanation he really didn't need.

"Yes, he's awake," came Fishlegs' voice from behind him. Feeling even more faint, Hiccup spun, too quickly, and almost toppled off the loft. Fishlegs dropped the notebook he was holding in fright and Toothless let out a hoarse grunt, sticking his head out and pushing Hiccup onto the platform, giving him a chiding look.

"What are you all \_doing\_ here?" Hiccup asked, slightly alarmed. He motioned to Fishlegs and Snotlout and carefully went down the stairs, holding on to the wall as he went. "Where's my dad? What's going on? Who did you leave the â€" \_oh my gods\_. The writers! What happened to them?"

He dropped into a chair. Astrid bugged her eyes and tilted her head at the window. "Be \_quieter\_," she hissed. "They can \_hear\_ us, I think."

"Oh, noâ€|" Feeling sicker with every step, Hiccup went to the window and peeked out the shutter.

There were dozens. A hundred, maybe two, primarily all teenaged girls, surrounding his house in rings. How he hadn't heard their incessant chatter, muttering, and occasional high-pitched laughter, he didn't know. As soon as he saw them, they saw him, setting off screams that just seemed to \_multiply.\_



He slammed the shutter closed.

"Oh. My. GODS." He sank to the ground, exhaling slowly, trying to ignore the shrieks of, "HIC-CUP! HIC-CUP! HIC-CUP!" and rounded on the twins. "What did you do?!"

"Us? Are you talking to us?" Tuffnut paused from throwing the pebbles down at Ruffnut's head and jumped down. "We didn't do anything! It was all you. You got sick, you passed out, and then they took Gothi's house. She's really mad, by the way. Says we're going to have a real problem if she got into those fertility herbs â€" but, man, if you knew what Astrid had to do to get your body backâ€"|"

Hiccup turned his head so fast he cracked his neck. Astrid gave a leisurely shrug and tossed the whetstone over her shoulder. "It's nothing they can't handle," she assured him.

"Oh. Oh, great. So, what, it's night now? Where's my dad? Where's the rest of the village? The dragons? Oh, gods, tell me you didn't let them get to the dragonsâ€"|"

Astrid got up and grabbed his wrists, stopping his monologue mid-sentence. "Look, Hiccup, I know you're upset, but you're gonna have to be quieter\_."

"We're hiding," Tuffnut whispered.

"The village is in lockdown," Ruffnut explained. "Everyone's either in their houses or the Great Hall, if they were out when they attacked. Your dad's with them."

"\_Attacked?\_"

Snotlout was the one who shrugged this time, yawning. "Well, we've been waiting for you to wake up. We're gonna put them in the cages now, right?"

"You know, I still don't feel goodâ€"|" Not acting...uh,\_ at all\_, Hiccup shuffled to the stairs. "Well, see you all later. Have fun figuring out what to do. I'm just gonnaâ€"|"

Toothless helped him back up the stairs, shooting malicious glares at the other teens. "Good night!" Before Astrid could blink, Hiccup was snoring.

"Wow, he must really be sick," she said wonderingly. When she turned back to the others, Ruffnut was fingering a sword on the wall. "Ruff! Put that down!"

Instead, she grabbed the hilt and swung it out of its bracket. "C'mon, Tuff," she muttered, grinning mischievously. "There's enough ceremonial weapons in here to arm Berk. Let's get those writers in shape and the swords will be back before Hiccup wakes up again."

"What? Tuff, don't you da-"

It was Fishlegs' acquiescence that sent her over the edge. "You know,

Astrid, I don't think Hiccup's really in a position to be making decisions at this timeâ€|"

"Oh, all right," she grumbled, turning her axe over in her hand. "Let's do this." It was just as well she didn't know that the sword Ruffnut was caressing with her calloused thumb had belonged to Grimbeard the Ghastly, Hiccup's great-great grandfather and the greatest Viking pirate who ever lived.

And if a few extra bloodstains were ever noticed on the Haddock family heirlooms, no one ever told \_Astrid\_ about it.

.

But when Hiccup didn't reappear for two more days, Astrid was fed up.

"He's hiding," she fumed at the other teens. "I swear to you, he's up in his bedroom, locked in tight, all nice and safe and \_fine\_ and \_drawing\_ or something. And Toothless is with him!"

"Well, he kind of \_is\_ sick," Fishlegs began, but Astrid was done listening.

"I'm going there," she announced, boosting herself onto Stormfly's back. "You keep an eye on \_these\_."

Vikings had changed in these last few months, but Astrid still had her confident stride. She strode everywhere, except into Hiccup's house. She would never ever admit it, especially to him, but the one person she was terrified of offending was his father.

So she jumped off Stormfly, ordered her to go home as inconspicuously as possible, executed a quick drop roll, hugging the wall, and knocked on the front door very quietly. Stoick finally answered the door after ten minutes and several dozen more knocks in which she was starting to panic a little- the fangirls weren't completely unobservant- and gestured upstairs, somewhat less gruff than the last time she had seen him, in which he had yelled at them about how they were \_irresponsible\_, they had the \_attention spans of sparrows\_, they made him fear for the \_future of the tribe\_, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. It seemed to last until Ragnarok, with them all mumbling apologies and keeping their eyes fixed firmly on the fur of their boots. Hiccup was the only one of them not cowed. He had spoken in that softly determined, persuasive voice he pulled out when he really wanted something- the voice that sometimes reminded her almost too forcibly Hiccup was a Viking, and he managed to work out a solution that didn't involve exile (which would have \_really\_ made Astrid's mother proud). Of course, the incessant shivering and coughing had managed to clinch the deal quite nicely.

The general lack of fury in Stoick's eyes relaxed her. She was fairly certain Hiccup's father liked her. It was hard to tell these things with the chief, even for Hiccup, who regularly doubted whether Stoick loved him or not.

"Aye, lass, watch yerself. That overgrown lizard babies him like he's his young. He might try to take your fingers off." Stoick shook his beard. "Not like he's \_my\_ young or anything."

Astrid grimaced. "Thanks, Chief."

She knocked on the wall next to Hiccup's loft, paused a for a fraction of a second, and charged in.

Hiccup looked up. "Why do you never knock?" His voice was exasperated, but he was smiling. Toothless lifted his head from where it had been resting on Hiccup's lap and nodded at her, pupils narrowed. \_No funny business\_, his eyes warned. \_Or I will be forced to hurt you.\_

"I thought you were sick," she replied, sitting on the floor next to his chair.

"Oh, I am," he assured her. "But I'll live." He shrugged. "I've been working." He held up a sheet of parchment:

Berk Fanfiction Academy: Lesson Plans.

Astrid met his eyes, which, she noted with an unwanted twinge of tender concern, were wan, red, and looked almost bruised. \_Has he been sleeping?\_ "I thought you were sick!" She protested. "You had an excuse to relax. We handled it." All her anger at his lazing around had suddenly evaporated. Toothless snorted in agreement. Hiccup tapped his ear and eyed her axe. "I refuse to work clean-up. Somebody needs to be the brains of the operation. But seriously, did you hear the way those girls were yelling for me?"

"Okay, you can talk to Ruffnut," Astrid said indignantly. "Because I didn't maim anyone." After a second's thought, she added, "And yes. The entire Barbaric Archipelago heard them."

Hiccup sifted through his piles of parchment. "I've worked out classes. I tried to put similar offenders together. We're taking turns teaching... I made a list of our grievances. We're going to re-educate them about it all." His voice had taken on the almost childlike enthusiasm he had for every new project he undertook.

"When are we opening our doors?" she asked, absorbing a little infectious excitement. "Because we've been hiding for a long time now."

Hiccup looked at Toothless, who growled. Hiccup sighed. "Well, that depends. Toothless seems to think-" he sneezed, "-that I should rest another day or two. So I guess as soon as the warden deems it fit to release me. Unless you guys can handle it without me?"

Astrid thought of the sheer mass of writers, and thought that just one more body on their side wouldn't be unwelcome at all. \_Especially\_ if that was Hiccup.

"Thor'sDay Thursday okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, fine," Hiccup sighed. "Why not ruin the holiday? You wanna stay a little longer, or...?"

Blushing, Astrid hopped up. "No thanks. I don't want to provoke your dad any more than I already have. Plus, I want to get home before dark." She shivered.

"Oh, good idea," Hiccup agreed. "If you want, I'll send Toothless with you-"

"No!" Hiccup stared at her. Astrid took a deep breath to calm herself, then explained, "If you heard some of the things they're shouting about Toothless, you'd want to keep away from him too."

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When Hiccup finally emerged, still pale, still a little dizzy, Astrid wished he'd had the good sense to remain in bed.

But he hadn't. He walked slowly into the arena with a hand gripping Toothless' head, looking haunted.

"I barely got away. Thank Thor I know the forest better than they do, or I'd probably be chained to my dad's throne by now. Did you know they have a camp on the bluff?"

Astrid nodded grimly. "I think it's time to bring them in. I have no idea how we're going to restrain them, but..."

"Okay." Hiccup took a deep breath, rubbed his hands together, and smiled for the first time in days. "Let's go."

The notices had been posted in the very darkest hours of night, by cloaked and clumsy Vikings\_. All visitors are invited to report Fanfiction Training Classes in the Arena at noon. More information will be provided then.\_ Hiccup had enlisted Penelope to inscribe the words in those foreign runes not one Viking could write in. Actually, there were dozens of different types, but he had her do the most prevalent despite her bragging that she knew "Frenksch" and "Chpanisch" as well. His father had frowned. "Looks Roman. You're not descended from a Roman, are you?" he'd asked her. She'd swallowed, wondering how to break it to the Vikings about this thing called \_Italy\_, and backed up into Toothless, who grumbled in protest. "Odin help me if I'll have the granddaughter of a Roman in my house, lass. Arrogant idiots in togas, my father used to say."

"No, no," Penelope said hastily. "I'm actually Greek."

Stoick shrugged. "I can handle a Greek. Still run amok in togas, but lacking the sheer arrogance."

.

The gang snuck in the arena at dawn. Hiccup nearly had a heart attack when Snotlout dropped his shield and swore loudly. The twins cackled.

"Fangirls, fangirls! Light sleepers!" he hissed. "Get in the arena! Now!"

"Why do we always have to listen to you?" Snotlout whined.

"Just do it!" Astrid snarled.

"Only for you, Astrid," he winked.

"Shut up, Lout," she groaned.

"Can I hit him?" Ruffnut asked hopefully.

Fishlegs swallowed and looked behind them. "The statistical probability of us being discovered is rising exponentially," he cautioned.

Toothless nosed Hiccup forward. Hookfang saw the dragon nip in Hiccup's pocket and promptly knocked his master right over in his haste to reach it. The twins threatened Barf and Belch into entering the arena. Stormfly pranced in, spotting a puddle she could examine her reflection in.

Toothless snorted at his counterparts' weakness and walked in with dignity. Hiccup snorted as he locked the gate behind their dragons.

"Hey, we did it!" Tuffnut said it like it was his personal accomplishment.

Hiccup nodded. "Thank you," he muttered skywardly to whatever god had finally listened. "And now we wait."

They did. The others appeared impatient, and the anticipation (not a good kind) was overwhelming Hiccup. In his experience, the nervousness and worry preceding an event was almost always worse than the thing itself - but he had a horrible suspicion it wouldn't be so this time.

Fangirls. They defied nature.

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Once again, Hiccup's senses were overwhelmed with the sheer mass of them- their roaring chatter, the way they stretched almost through his little village. He winced as he watched them trample through his streets, push against his people ("Restrain yourselves," he begged them under his breath. "Please, no maiming, just hold it in...") and a few of the wilder ones even ripped pieces of houses off, for, he supposed, souvenirs. But who could begin to imagine?

He exchanged what he hoped was a brave and winning look with Astrid, who sent what she hoped was a confident smirk back.

He held his hand up. "Please quiet down," he told them. No one seemed to be able to hear him, and he tried again. "Everyone-

Astrid brandished her axe and yelled, "SHUT UP!" Just behind her, Ruffnut grinned sadistically and ground a fist into her palm, eyeing the crowd excitedly. Tuffnut jerked a thumb at the girls, mouthing, "She'll really do it!"

They fell almost instantly silent.

Hiccup settled his arm over Toothless, took a deep breath, and looked out into the sea of expectant, enraptured faces. One of them held up her hands so the space between them formed a heart. Another was jumping up and down and screaming silently, tossing her hair. He

gulped and tried to steel himself. "Welcome to fanfiction training."

### 3. In Which The Definition Of Fluff Is

\*\*\*\*Hiccup's advice to the fluff writers about revision? Yep. I should take that. Except I've been meaning to edit my earliest stories for months. I think I'll just let them fade away and hope no one ever reads them. On a more related note, thoughts? Questions? Compliments? (We like all of those.) Drop a review. Our next chapter I get the joy of going off on one of my greatest irritations. Look forward to it. And over to Astrid. \*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*Well, this was a silence a little too long! Wordwielder and I have been busily writing, and then my computer (congrats to it) had another one of its tantrums and put us a bit behind. In this chapter: Astrid uses her axe a little too much (what else is new?), Hiccup finally loses what patience remains to him (and begins to regret getting himself into this mess), and Snotlout does something nearly unforgivable. Enjoy!\*\*\*\*

\* \* \*

<p><span><strong><strong>Debated<strong>\*\*

"Okay, right off," Hiccup said. "We're laying down ground rules."

Astrid held up her axe. "First rule: you do not talk unless Hiccup or one of us \_says \_you can talk. You talk without permission and I will personally throw you into the cages with the really grumpy dragons."

"You do not want to do that!" Fishlegs warned. "We have a \_Boneknapper!\_" His voice dropped to a low, fearful whisper. No one needed to tell them the Boneknapper was like a large, cuddly dog that loved people.

The really dedicated fans opened their mouths, perhaps remembering the end of Gobber's tale, (and eagerly looking around for baby Boneknappers) but Ruffnut brandished her fists and no one let a whisper of a syllable escape their lips.

"Rule two," Hiccup continued. "You're welcome to ask questions, but have a filter. We're not going to answer ridiculous questions."

A girl frantically waved her hand. Hiccup braced himself. "Yesss?"

"So you and Astrid, what's happening there?" Another girl hissed from nowhere, "Have you two-" but was interrupted by a Terrible Terror launching itself at her face.

Hiccup choked on air and turned beet red. ("\_Thank you,\_ Thor-") Astrid felt heat rush up her neck. "Filter!" Hiccup gasped. "I'm not answering that question."

Another girl raised her hand. Astrid eyed her. "I am not telling you \_anything\_ that may or may not have happened between Hiccup and

me."

Tears erupted from nowhere. Chaos was reestablished at once.  
"\_Please?" \_yelled a dozen girls at once.

"No!" Astrid snarled, becoming more and more unsettled.

"What's the \_point\_ of \_being\_ here, then?" wailed a boy Astrid could swear was older than her - he even had a \_beard.\_

"Great question." Snotlout was leaning against Hookfang's wing, winking at a group of around twenty-five swooning girls (and a ten-year-old boy, but that was beyond Astrid's reasoning capabilities) and attracted several more by speaking.

"Uh, care to elaborate, Snotlout?"

At this, a brown-haired girl turned to her neighbor excitedly and said in a loud voice, "I just read a great fanfiction where Snotlout does the heir challenge and totally tries to kill Hi-"

"Will you just \_shut up?\_"

The outburst was Hiccup's. All eyes turned to him. The color that had been draining slowly out of his face returned full force. He fidgeted. "Um, please. Restrain yourselves. Second rule. Astrid?"

Astrid abandoned the set of pre-memorized rules for an improvised one. "There is no \_heir challenge.\_ Hiccup is heir and that's that."

"Well, actually," Snotlout began.

"Shut your mouth!" Astrid hissed. "If you get into the nuances of the laws, I swear to Odin, \_Snotface\_ Snotlout, I will-"

"O-kay, touchy," he grumbled.

"Anyway," Hiccup cut in, his eye narrowed at them both. "Third rule: this is not vacation. You're here to learn. And you will."

A boy raised his hand quite calmly; Hiccup nodded to him with a wave of relief. "What are we learning?"

Hiccup grinned. This was a question he could answer. "The basics of grammar and spelling, fanfiction dos and don'ts, Viking culture and history, dragon and weapons training. That's the basics, anyway. There's a lot to cover in three months."

"Three months?" A girl said, followed by clapping her hand to her mouth and springing her other hand up. Hiccup called on her.

"What about our families back home?" she asked. "Won't they notice we're gone?"

"The sponsors are taking care of that," Hiccup promised. "Something to do with a time loop or something absolutely crazy like that. That's the best I've got," he said apologetically as more hands flew up.

Preoccupied with the dozen or so girls clamoring questions at him, Hiccup didn't notice Fishlegs' stricken face behind him. "We have \_sponsors?"\_

'Um, yeah, it's a complicated thing," Hiccup said vaguely. "They're handling their-" he gestured to the crowd- "their world. They helped bring them here and I \_hope\_" he dropped his voice. "- they'll help to bring them back, too." He put back on his teaching face and began again, "Rule four. Please behave decently while you're here. That means you will not overreact in any manner to dragons, Vikings, or...anything, really. Please stop defacing property. Show respect for Berk and its inhabitants. Just...calm... down."

The irony of that statement hit him as he watched a girl bounce on her heels.

"Well, I think that's it," he finished, trying not to let discouragement creep into his voice. "And now, please remain seated and let us sort you into your first classes."

"Is there a rule five?" wondered Tuffnut. "I feel like there should be a rule five."

"Don't do this," suggested Ruffnut and slapped him hard across the back of the head.

"Rule five," Hiccup added, rolling his eyes. "SINGLE FILE LINE!" he yelled. "Single file lines, always. And when I say always, I mean \_always.\_ Go ahead now." He gestured his hand. Toothless sat up, ready to go from big-eyed and cuddly to \_NIGHT-FURY-GET-DOWN!\_

"And if you \_touch\_ any of us," Astrid said, brandishing her axe. "I swear to Odin, you will get to see a genuine Viking funeral."

"Astrid!" Hiccup hissed.

"I'm serious," she added. "Especially Hiccup."

Even though he rolled his eyes, he couldn't help but being a little flattered.

They had, eventually, decided that only some of the fans would be allowed to learn at a time; there really just wasn't enough room. To Hiccup's intense displeasure, the twins and Snotlout had shot down this claim and picked out a class to take to the mountain.

This left Fishlegs, Astrid, and Hiccup with the other half in the arena.

There were a few boys scattered in the group, but the majority were teen girls. Hiccup gulped and fished for his lesson plan.

"Um, right," he said into the silence. "Fluff. Uh, usually, it's not acceptable-"

"\_What?!\_"

Astrid turned to Hiccup pleadingly. "Come on. Please. It can be my



birthday present."

Hiccup crossed his arms. "I already gave you a birthday present."

A girl raised her hand. "Wait, what did you get her?"

Hiccup squinted at the notebook she had whipped out from nowhere, said flatly, "No way," and narrowed his eyes at Astrid.

"It can be my Snoggletog present! Please just let me handle this lesson!"

"I already know what I'm getting you for Snoggletog," Hiccup lied.

Astrid narrowed her eyes at him. "You do not. That's months away."

"I'm just that good," Hiccup tried, then snorted. "Okay, no, I really don't have any idea yet. But seriously. Co-teach."

"Fine," Astrid grumbled. "I have strong feelings on this topic," she told the writers.

"\_Strong \_feelings," Fishlegs cautioned.

"Fluff," Astrid continued, walking among them, and swinging her axe casually. Several girls had to duck.

"Astrid," Hiccup warned. "Weapon. Scary."

"Thor, you baby them!" she exclaimed, throwing it down with an eye roll. "The number one reason we all find fluff generally disgusting and annoying is because it invariably spawns out of character reactions, conversations, etc. Now, we didn't bring anyone here solely based on fluff-writing, unless it was excessive. Because we just do not have room for all those offenders. The problem is prevalent."

"Was I brought here for fluff?" The speaker was concealed in the crowd. Almost instinctively, the fangirls parted to reveal a little girl sitting on the floor sucking her thumb. Her hair was short and pulled up into messy braids, and she seemed to be on the verge of tears.

"What's your name?" Astrid asked suspiciously, checking the list.

"Maddie," warbled the girl.

"Your \_penname\_," Fishlegs explicated, looking nervous.

"Oh. Hiccup."

Behind them, Hiccup groaned and muttered to Toothless, "Why is it always \_my\_ name that they mess up? Why can't it be Astrid's? Just once?"

Astrid, on the other hand, was having some more strong feelings. Glancing at the list in her hand with a disgusted look, she turned

back over her shoulder and whispered to Hiccup, "Is lemon a punishable offense?"

Fishlegs nodded vigorously with wide eyes while Hiccup shook his head. Astrid chose to believe Fishlegs, stalked forward, and grabbed Maddie by her sleeve.

"Anybody else write `"_lemon_"` here?" she roared.

The whole congregation hastily shook their heads.

"Good." Without the slightest hint of remorse, Astrid towed the sniffing girl to the cage that had once held the Terrible Terror. She tossed her in.

"Astrid!" Hiccup ran forward, grabbing her by the shoulder and pulling her back. "You can't just - just `_jail_` the kids-" He looked at Maddie. "How old are you?"

"Nine," she sobbed.

"Liar!" shouted a fanboy. "She told me she was eleven!"

"Shut `_up!_`" yelled Astrid. "What did I tell you about `_talking?_`"

"Merriam Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus defines it as 'something inconsequential,'" called a boy, holding a pocket-sized book and squinting to read it. "That's not fair!"

"Whoa, whoa, wait. Merry-what's a call it defines `_talking_` as inconsequential? I talk all the time!"

Hiccup's stomach plummeted at the voice. As one, he, Astrid, and Fishlegs whipped around to look up through the chains of the kill ring at Tuffnut, sitting on Belch's grinning head. Ruffnut nodded her agreement. With a groan, Hiccup spotted Snotlout catching up to them.

"What are you `_doing?_`" Astrid demanded, swinging her axe in frustration. "We gave you the other half of the class!"

Snotlout gave a leisurely shrug. "Oh, nothing. Left 'em on the mountaintop for survival lessons for a couple of days - the usual stuff."

"Snotlout!" Hiccup was furious. The fangirls in the arena were chatting amongst themselves again, apparently not realizing how close they'd come to such a fate. "You - you can't just `_abandon_` these people on the mountain!"

"Why?" Snotlout asked, looking hurt. "You let Astrid throw that little girl in a cage!"

"I'm not a little girl," sobbed Maddie, but no one paid her the slightest bit of attention.

"I did not," Hiccup protested. "I was just on my way over to get that little girl `_out_` of the cage, actually-"

"She writes \_lemon,\_" Astrid hissed.

"I \_know.\_ And she's \_nine.\_ And you - you need to go get your class! They'll be frozen solid by nightfall if you don't! And - oh, gods." Hiccup stopped his instructions mid-sentence and rubbed his forehead. "Oh my gods. What did I get myself into, here?"

"This is why we need them in \_cages,\_" Astrid reminded him.

"They are not going in cages," Hiccup said firmly. "They will \_never\_ be going in cages! We - we're not having them here to - to punish them until they break! They're here to \_learn."\_

"Amen," cried a girl in the second row with glasses and a strange symbol drawn on her forehead.

"\_Amen?"\_ whispered Fishlegs confusedly. "What's \_ah-men?"\_

"You know what? I don't know," snapped Hiccup. "I don't know \_everything!"\_

Astrid blinked. "Clearly. You don't know we should lock them all up."

Hiccup looked unhinged for a moment before turning very calmly back to the class. "Alright. New approach. I'm going to talk. Please don't interrupt me, or I'll leave you to Astrid's devices. You'll have a short verbal quiz on this next time, so listen carefully. You-" Hiccup muttered to the gang. "Either \_shut up\_ and let me get through this, or go help find the other half before they get eaten."

"Well then," Snotlout huffed. "Let's get out of here, then."

Astrid glared at Hiccup.

"They probably actually do need your help," he said apologetically.

Her mouth twitched. "Probably. This isn't over yet," she warned the class before sauntering out. Hiccup watched her go before realizing, he was doing it again. What was it about Astrid Hofferson? He always found himself studying her like a new dragon species. He sure understood dragons better.

He mussed his hair, inciting some repulsive sighs, and limped back to the front of the class. Toothless fluttered up behind him, anticipating exactly what he did next: sitting down and leaning against the warm scales.

"I'll be brief on fluff. It's hit or miss, really- for all of us. Especially," Hiccup tried to refrain from laughing and sort of succeeded. "Astrid. Thor, she's not a fluff fan. Basically, if you're writing fluff- don't change the characters to fit the plot. That's important. Astrid is never going to want to be showered with affection. That's just not who she is, or who she ever will be. Ruffnut is never going to be cuddly and soft. Fishlegs is never going to be bold and suave.

"So if you keep it in character, your other issues sort of go away. You aren't going to get the blood feuds and duels-we'll get to

those," he added hastily. "There won't be over the top dialogue or excessive...flowers, and stuff. Length is another fluff factor- you go over a certain word count, it's just not okay. I can't tell you exactly when to cut it off-" he raised his hands as worried questions spewed out of writers. "But if you pay attention, you should get a feel for when to stop. Essentially, be as romantic as you like- but be as realistic as we like. Before I take questions-" \_before I am bombarded by questions, \_he thought, "know that this isn't a precise science. I'll do my best, but I'm not an expert."

First question came from a guilty-looking woman who asked, "So what about our past...failures. Should we re-edit those? Delete them?"

"Well," Hiccup replied slowly. "If you have time, it might be a good idea to re-edit them. Start over, especially since you know us now. Unless they really are terrible. In that case it might be simpler to just press delete."

A chorus of crying greeted his words.

Exasperated, Hiccup gripped his hair and turned to Toothless. "What is \_wrong\_ with these people, Bud?"

His moment was interrupted by the return of a very agitated Monstrous Nightmare, smoking slightly. Several of the fangirls screamed. Snotlout slid off Hookfang's neck and ran to Hiccup. "Uh, hey, Hiccup? They're gone."

#### 4. Of Adjectives and Grammatical

**\*\*Hello! So sorry for the wait, but coming up with this stuff is amazingly time-consuming, especially when you have to coordinate writing times. More hilarity will ensue. Over to WW: \*\***

**\_\*\*\_As per usual...it's all on me. You know the whole 12% discussion in the Avengers? Yeah. I'm the Pepper in this situation. Except I really only did do 12%. Applause for Astrid, please. Now read on, and enjoy.\_ \*\*\_**

**\* \* \***

**<p><span><strong>Error<strong>**

Luckily for Hiccup - or not, both had their merits - the second group was not "lost." This was mostly due to the thankfully small size of Berk and the fact that fangirls know little to nothing about boating. Hiccup had left Fishlegs and Meatlug in charge of the first group, their lesson on fluff interrupted, and mounted up to sighs and even one faint. Ignoring this totally, he'd followed Snotlout to the place where he claimed they'd last seen the fangirls.

It was, unfortunately, on the mountain, just where Snotlout said it would be. Hiccup could see the unfortunate signs of their passage - a few wobbly marriage proposals carved unskillfully in horrific Norse and something that looked fearfully like a hagalah surrounded by a heart, not to mention trampled grass in every direction.

Shuddering, Hiccup hopped off Toothless and went over to the

twins.

"I told them to stay here," Snotlout said. "You know, in case the fangirls come back." He threw out his chest proudly. Hiccup scowled at him.

"Where's Astrid?"

"She and Stormfly went after the fangirls," Tuffnut interjected. Hiccup started. At first glance, he'd assumed Ruff and Tuff were together. A panic swept over him as he realized that Ruff wasn't there either.

"You let the two of them go \_alone?" \_

Tuff shrugged. "Yeah? So?"

"So they're - they're probably in the middle of sacrificing them by now," Hiccup spat, pounding a fist into his forehead. "\_What \_made me think I could trust you guys?!"

Snotlout looked at him. "You trust us?"

Hiccup exhaled, trying to think. "Toothless? Let's go, bud."

"Whoa, whoa, wait - what about us?"

"You're coming with me," Hiccup said over his shoulder as he climbed on Toothless. "I'm gonna need more backup than Astrid and Ruff." Hiccup waited for them, seething.

"Geez, Hiccup, chill out," Tuff said.

Hiccup stared at him. "What?"

Tuff shrugged. "I heard one of the girls say it."

"Let's just-go," Hiccup sighed. "C'mon, bud." Toothless fluttered his wings, and they shot up-the famous almost vertical takeoff.

"Oh, Toothless, do you have to be such a show off?" Hiccup complained, looking apprehensively at the bouncing group of fans on the ground. He flinched as one screamed, presumably with delight, but it sounded more like a Nightmare was using her as a chew toy.

That thought probably shouldn't have amused him. He was becoming Astrid.

Finding the lost fangirls wasn't difficult; Hiccup knew exactly where to go once he heard Ruff yell, "OY! PAY ATTENTION OR WE'LL THROW YOU OFF THIS MOUNTAIN ONE BY ONE AND THE SEA MONSTERS WHO ESCAPED FROM HEL WILL DEVOUR YOU IN A SINGLE GULP!"

Hm. Ruff had a way with words once you got her going.

Astrid and Ruffnut were standing facing the mob, Stormfly shrieking protectively from behind them. Astrid was smiling tightly and gripping her axe; Ruffnut had a javelin poised and ready to throw.

"Oh-kay, let's try to avoid that fate," Hiccup said as they landed. Snotlout narrowly avoided landing on a few writers. One was actually hit by Hookfang's wing. Hiccup cringed. "OUT OF THE WAY," Snotlout bellowed.

One of the fangirls screamed with delight at Hiccup's and Snotlout's arrival. "Oh my \_God,\_" she whimpered. "They're just as beautiful as they are in the movie!"

To Hiccup's intense discomfort, the girl ran up and looked intimately into his face, reaching out with one brazen hand to touch the scar on his chin. "Hey, so, space," Hiccup sputtered, leaning away. Astrid yelled, "Down! We were NOT kidding about the sea monsters!"

The girl was not deterred. "\_Textured.\_ They even made it \_textured,\_" she sighed, obviously in ecstasy.

"Did you eat some of the green berries?" Astrid demanded. "Because you've got the delirium. Back. Off."

"Maybe she's just dehydrated?" Hiccup suggested. "When was the last time we fed them?"

"I'm a film student," the girl said, and flipped her hair at Astrid, who blinked, slightly stunned that anyone would dare while she was holding an axe. "Gwendolline Blake."

Astrid, despite her self-oath that she would never ask Hiccup something too important in front of the victims, found herself whispering, "What's a gwenline?"

"What's a film?" Snotlout asked. "Wait, where's Tuff? Did we lose him? \_Again\_?"

"How many times have you lost him before?" A fangirl asked, looking personally affronted.

"We don't do it on purpose," Ruff huffed. "And, what, twelve times?"

"Ruff does it on purpose," Hiccup interjected. "I would, too, if I had to put up with him that often."

"Has it really been that many?" Astrid wondered.

"It's kind of a blur," Snotlout agreed. Hiccup swiveled on Toothless' back to look for BelchBarf - who, unsurprisingly, was not present. He sighed.

"Okay, team, Astrid, you go look for Tuff. Snotlout, go with her."

"Remember when I knocked him off a cliff?" Ruff reminisced, still lost in the moment. "And he was a foot from death..." she sighed happily.

"That's creepy," whispered a teenage boy a few rows of shivering writers back. "I can't imagine \_my\_ sister doing that to me..."

"She's probably imagined it," Ruff yelled to him. "Watch out, you never can tell. It's always the ones you don't expect."

"Ruff, I think we can handle these fangirls." Raising his voice, Hiccup shouted, "We're all heading back to Berk! You're gonna have to walk, so quit talking and get in your single file line!"

"Back to Berk?" A girl with two blue streaks in her hair piped up, looking confused. "Umm, aren't we on Berk?"

A boy hissed at her, "Berk is the island and the village. God." Another three girls turned to him. "God\_s\_!"

"What a great intro to the lesson we didn't have planned," Hiccup muttered, nodding to Astrid and Snotlout, trying to communicate to them that they should leave. Snotlout didn't seem too eager, but Astrid grabbed him by the wrist ("Ow, Astrid! I thought Hiccup's dad told you to control your anger more!") and towed him to their dragons. "Be careful," she mouthed to Hiccup, and nodded at an older woman in the far back. "That one's been making plans. Solitary confinement!"

"Enough with the cages," Hiccup breathed, then turned back to the mob. "Single file line. I told you already."

The line, hastily assembled at Hiccup's command, straightened out admirably when Toothless shot a few well-aimed plasma bolts on either side ("That's it, bud, extra cod for you tonight.") A few fangirls (and one shaking boy) screamed, and Gwendolline, who had refused to move, muttered, "He really does bribe him with food! Who knew the fanfiction writers were actually right..."

Hiccup, whose long patience was beginning to fray, turned to her severely. "And are you going to tell me that you're not a fanfiction writer? Furthermore, you're a bad fanfiction writer. You're not any better than them. That's why you're here."

"Actually, she's not," Ruffnut remarked, smiling evilly as she approached Gwendolline from behind. Her javelin, Hiccup noticed, had a faint red bloodstain on it, and she rested it on Gwendolline's shoulder, who sucked in her breath, terrified. "She's that intern I was telling you about, the one who tried to break into DreamWorks and has a restraining order from Bonnie Arnold?"

"They know about the movie?!"

"Ruffnut," Hiccup choked. "You thought bringing a practical stalker into our lives was a smart idea?"

"She needs the help even more than some of them," Ruff protested, nodding at the line, which was starting to bulge out in several areas as people turned and stepped out to look at the confrontation.

Hiccup pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes. "I'll agree with that," he conceded, "but we'll have to deal with her when we get back to the village."

"In the cages?" Ruff said hopefully.

"NO!" Although adamant about the issue, Hiccup's response was angrier than he'd intended, as Gwendolline, taking advantage of his closed eyes, poked his cheekbone with one prodding finger. Startled, his eyelids flew open and he stumbled backward and fell.

"Two things," he said solemnly from the ground, trying to ignore the whispers and giggles from the line twisting to get a good look at him. "One, Ruff, maybe that's not such a bad idea, and two, Toothless! Come \_on,\_ you let me fall \_now?\_"

Toothless gave him a look Hiccup read instantly as, "Don't be so dramatic." Hiccup rolled his eyes. "Come on, let's go. \_I said a single-file line!" \_Toothless screeched, and they fell back in line perfectly. "Excellent work, bud. We're flying overhead, follow as quickly as possible. If any of you are inclined to wander off again...I'd just like you to know that it reaches freezing here before sundown. And after? Us and dragons aren't the only things living on this island." With that ominous half-truthful warning (Vikings, of all people, did not fear boar, but Hiccup did), he mounted and started directing traffic.

Finally back in the training ring, Hiccup found Fishlegs happily dictating on Gronkles to a small but dedicated audience. Mostly, anyway. The majority was at least paying attention, a few were taking notes, and some in the back were desperately fighting sleep. Hiccup could sympathize. Fishlegs was a brilliant mind, certainly, but once he started expounding on dragons he could talk Thor into a nice nap.

"Got them," Hiccup said tiredly, returning to his position against Toothless' back and watching the fans straggle in. Most of them were rubbing their arms or blowing into their fingers; Hiccup, to his surprise, did not find this particularly worrisome. So what if they had frostbite? It was recoverable. Most of the time. It wasn't like losing some toes would kill them, anyway.

"Oh." Fishlegs drooped, and Ruffnut appeared at the end of the line, stretching, which had merged into small groups of two and three. Half-heartedly, Hiccup considered forcing a single-file line, but was too tired to give the order. "We were having so much fun while you guys were gone, right?"

One girl at the very front nodded emphatically. "Jenny's been my best student," Fishlegs told Hiccup enthusiastically. "She really loves Gronkles and keeps quoting me..." Hiccup noticed a flush of color on Fishlegs' cheeks.

"Huh," Hiccup smiled. "You two had a good time, then? Wish I could say the same. Astrid and Snotlout are off attempting to recover Tuffnut and BelchBarf." With a yawn, Hiccup glanced up at the sky. "They need to eat sometime, and we still need to go over grammar..."

Fishlegs, Hiccup was pleased to see, actually appeared to be thinking for a solution. Maybe he should leave him alone with the students more often...Hiccup swept his gaze over the class, who seemed actually mostly well-behaved and...well...normal.

Maybe because it was Fishlegs, there hadn't been any attempted hostage-holding, and Fishlegs didn't really look any worse for



wear...Hiccup shuddered at the thought of being left alone with the fangirls by himself.

He would probably be dead by now.

"Let's take them to the Great Hall," Fishlegs suggested. "They can have something to eat and there's enough room in there for all of them."

"You have a point." Hiccup looked at the mob, which was starting to get a little sleepy, he hoped. "Do you think we can trust them to not, you know, ravage it?"

Fishlegs shrugged, then raised his voice. "Everybody!" he screamed. "We're going to take you to dinner, but you have to be respectful to the Great Hall! Otherwise we'll feed you to the worms!"

Hiccup watched, impressed, as the mob straightened up nervously, and - thank the gods! - began to assemble themselves in a single-file line. "Wow. Fishlegs. Didn't know you had it in you."

"My granddad was a Berserk. My mom says I'll be the next one," Fishlegs pursed his lips. "Alright, follow us!"

A fangirl was trod on by Stormfly as Astrid returned, panting slightly. Hiccup tried desperately not to laugh as the girl squawked. Ruffnut was less successful, but Astrid barely spared her a grin as she slid down Stormfly's side. Hookfang and BelchBarf ducked through the entrance a moment later and Snotlout and Tuffnut toppled off together.

Numbly, Hiccup stared at the scene, then sighed, supposing he should get up and go over. His calf twinged as he pushed himself to his feet, and Toothless, almost as if sensing his pain, snuffed anxiously.

"Fine, bud. Hang on one second..."

As Hiccup drew closer, the more disturbing it became. The first, immediately conspicuous detail was that Tuffnut's...erm...distinctive blond dreadlocks were, well, missing. His hair was now short, shorter than Hiccup's, and, shockingly, clean. His wrists and feet were bound, too, with what looked terrifyingly like some of the fangirls' undergarments. His tunic and leggings had been replaced...by an oversized and obviously foreign dress. His gag was slipping, and he shouted, wriggling viciously, while Astrid and Snotlout tried to get close enough to help him and Ruffnut watched, torn between rage and hilarity.

Hiccup halted, transfixed with horror. Toothless padded up behind him, and before Hiccup could think, he was saying, "Uh, bud? Maybe we should get those ropes off him..." Indeed, Snotlout was now holding down a thrashing Tuff while Astrid carefully readied her axe above.

The plasma blast was over in a second, and Tuffnut wildly pulled his hands apart, grabbed the gag, and spit onto the floor. Hiccup carefully knelt down and withdrew a small dagger, sawing through the ropes around his ankles while Tuff groaned.

Hiccup hesitated, then said, "I hate to ask...but what \_happened\_ to you?"

Astrid sighed. "We found him in a cave on the north side of the island. There's a camp of maybe eight or nine that we didn't gather up at first. Apparently when Tuff wandered off they kidnapped him and knocked him out. When he woke up, his makeover was already almost done."

Hiccup peered closely at the traumatized Tuffnut. "Is that...eyeliner?" Frantically, Tuff swiped at his eyes, moaning desperately.

"\_Get it off...get it off..."\_

"It's okay," Hiccup said soothingly, the way he might calm a frightened dragon. "We're gonna get you all cleaned up and your hair'll grow back eventually..." Hiccup stepped back to survey the situation.

"Ruff, I need you to take Tuff back to your house. Fix him up, let him stay there for a few days. I don't want that cell to know he's okay." He lowered his voice. "Could you maybe consider cutting your hair too? To make him feel better?"

Ruffnut snorted.

"Orrrr not," Hiccup muttered.

"I'm not okay," Tuffnut whined from the floor, but Hiccup continued over him.

"Fishlegs, you did great today, so I'm gonna have you and Snotlout take these guys up to the Great Hall. Make sure you cover the grammar things and how they always steal my adjectives. Astrid and I are going to round up the kidnappers." Hands on hips, Hiccup looked at them. "Well, what are you waiting for? Go!"

Astrid stayed by his side, but Fishlegs and Snotlout hustled off to their dragons, the latter moaning about sleep and his long day. \_Ha. And you think \_\_\*\*this\*\*\_\_ is a long day...\_

He turned his head to check on Ruff...but there was no Ruff. "Ruffnut?"

Hiccup whipped back around and stared at Astrid. "Astrid, did you see Ruff...?"

Astrid's eyes widened in panic. "No..."

Together, they turned to look at the north side of the island, where a tiny light was flickering against the cliff.

"Oh, no."

.

"Yes, thank you so much Mrs. Thorston. No, I'm sure. Keep Tuffnut in the house for a couple days, we need him to stay away from the fangirls...yes, we're going to go rescue Ruffnut right now...and Mrs."

Thorston? If we're not back in about an hour, can you send Hiccup's dad with reinforcements? Have a good night!"

As the door slammed, Astrid slumped into the side of the house. Hiccup sighed. "Well, at least we don't have to worry about him..."

Hiccup looked at her, her beautiful blue eyes reflecting the stars he wished he could have time to enjoy tonight. "At least..."

He heaved yet another sigh and looked North. "Come on. Who knows what they're up to by now."

"More like what she's up to," Astrid remarked. "She can take care of herself."

"Oh, I know that," Hiccup said darkly, rubbing his nose in memory of all the times Ruffnut had clocked it.

"I think she gets it from Mrs. Thorston. She's one terrifying lady. Did you see her face when she looked at Tuffnut?"

Hiccup shuddered. "Unfortunately, I did."

.

Meanwhile, Fishlegs was in his element.

"Stealing our adjectives is not cool. Hiccup especially hates this. Just because he used the word fishbone once to describe himself - in a joking manner! - does not mean that you get to call him fishbone all the time. It is also not really acceptable to describe someone as how skinny or, um, husky they are, or by their hair color, once you've introduced them. It's the mark of an amateur. You guys are getting to be on your way to being not amateurs."

Fishlegs was growing hoarse. He'd already addressed most of the grammar issues - about how bad grammar made even the best of stories unreadable, how language was to be respected, how you really should bear in mind that teenagers with fire-breathing reptiles read all your work without you knowing it...

Most of the fangirls had fallen asleep by now. They lay sprawled on varying things in the Hall, curled up against each other, leaning on the walls, and one was even hugging a pillar. A few of the more enterprising had climbed right up onto the firepits for warmth, something Fishlegs was beginning to wish he'd thought of. Even Snotlout was out cold, leaning against Hookfang with his head tipped back and snoring loudly - obnoxious even in sleep.

Fishlegs yawned too, and, like he'd done so many times already that evening, let his eyes drift to Jenny.

She was sitting at the very front, propped up against a pillar and drowsily smiling at him. He'd been slightly disappointed that his second teaching stint hadn't gone as well as the first, but they'd had a hard day.

Jenny, admirably, had stayed awake the entire time and only now lapsed. She looked so sweet when she was asleep, Fishlegs pondered,

standing over her. Her medium-length brown hair lay docile and adorable, and her face was relaxed and, well, beautiful.

Unsure where he was supposed to go to sleep for tonight, Fishlegs decided to stay in the hall, just in case. Besides, he didn't like the idea of Jenny being alone with all these savages and Snotlout. Because being within a ten-mile radius of Snotlout pretty much guaranteed something unpleasant happening.

As he fell asleep, Fishlegs found himself pondering poetry.

\_Gronkles are red,\_

\_Meatlug is blue,\_

\_But neither are as pretty as you...\_

Meatlug wasn't blue, Fishlegs thought hazily, but it made a good rhyme.

Hey, Stormfly was blue...

.

But for Hiccup and Astrid, the night was far from over. And not in the way most fanfiction writers would dream of.

(However, if Hiccup had to rate it, T for violence.)

## 5. In Which The Students Explain

**\*\*AU\*\***

**\*\*Hey everyone! I am super proud of this chapter. We did it together and in a matter of hours. I was laughing my head off writing this, so hopefully you have the same reaction reading it. Over to my partner in crime, Astrid. Seriously. We are the new dynamic duo. Screw Batman and Robin. Us. \*\***

**\*\*So, this chapter? Wordwielder and I wrote almost the entire thing together - as in online at actually the same time in Google Docs. Let me tell you, that is the way to go. Although WW and I had some very contrasting interesting ideas (she had imagined a scene with Ruffnut and some rope (you'll see later) and I was more partial to spits) but we managed to pull this whopper through in the end. Enjoy it!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Although Hiccup doubted that creeping along a cliff with only a torch for light would have been trying in the best of times, Astrid really wasn't making it any better.<p>

"I just can't believe her. And them. And - ugh!" Astrid, who apparently felt confident enough to yank at her bangs while climbing, let out an explosive sigh. "Do you think we should have brought the dragons?"

Hiccup, who was silent and concentrating on not slipping and falling

to his death, shrugged slowly. "We should be able to handle them, I think. Besides, Toothless and Stormfly are on stand-by if things...go wrong. We'll be totally fine. And we'll have backup, too, from the village..."

"Well, I don't," Astrid grumbled in such an un-Astrid display of dependence he just about slipped anyway. "Stormfly loves hitting those fangirls. They give such a satisfying \_reaction,\_ too..."

Trying to ignore the wistful pleasure in her tone, Hiccup finally came to a stop a few feet from the mouth of the cave. "Maybe you should try to get her to quit doing that. Remember, there's a clause in the waiver." From this point, he could see the flickering of what had to be a fairly large fire, and panic shot through him as he realized he couldn't see Ruff anywhere.

"Why did we let them write that clause?" Astrid groaned. "It ruins everything."

"The sponsors kind of all want them to survive," Hiccup reminded her. "Of course, they don't exactly have to \_know\_ this..."

A roll of thunder clapped. "Oh, gods, they heard me," Hiccup gasped. "I was kidding!"

Lightning flashed and disappeared.

"That was creepy," Astrid remarked. "Are you sure it wasn't just Thor?"

"I hope not; is having Thor mad at me better?" Hiccup shuddered. "I'm not sure what I fear more: the gods, our sponsors, or the fangirls themselves." Struggling to pull himself back together, he asked, "Umm, so, Ruffnut? Where is she?"

Suddenly remembering the severity of the problem, Astrid transformed from whiny to ready in a second. "If she was a logical human being, I'd say she's biding her time, waiting for them to go to sleep. Since she's not, I'm actually kind of terrified. What if that's her in there, and she's already killed them?"

"Then we're in a lot of trouble. And I guess my dad would get involved, and then we'd have to put her on trial for murder, and the other tribes would probably get mad too, and it would be really bad. We made them a deal that they can't kill their writers, so we can't kill ours. It'd be worse than when my dad tried to strangle Norbert the Nutjob and we all almost went to war."

"It would not-" Astrid paused. "Well, it is Ruffnutâ€¦!"

After a moment of contemplating this horrible prospect, Astrid glared at Hiccup. "Why do you always have to jump to the worst case scenario?"

Hiccup shrugged. "You were the one who brought it up. And I do not, I'm just realistic!"

"You do too."

"I do no-" he paused. "We sound like the twins."

"Oh my gods. You're right. We're never arguing like that again."

Hiccup grinned. "Let's not say never. But, back to the, well, crisis."

And Astrid, never one for subtlety, walked straight in. Hiccup groaned. "Wait up," he hissed.

The dramatic entrance she was probably hoping for was lessened slightly by Hiccup straggling behind her, his metal leg scraping against the rock, barely catching up in time to see their reaction: open mouths, no Ruffnut in sight, and a distinct look of terror.

Hiccup, feeling that she had the conversation well under control, was just coming level to her when he felt a blinding pain in the side of his head and passed out.

It seemed like less than a second had passed before Hiccup came to again, a steady and sickening throb reverberating out from his temple to all the parts of his body that ached from the climb up.

"This is ridiculous," Astrid was yelling, almost directly in his ear. When Hiccup tried to touch his head, he discovered that they were bound back to back. He grasped at her fingers while simultaneously wondering whether it was appropriate in the situation.

"Owww," he groaned.

"Hey, you're okay!" she cried. "I'll still kill you all," she threatened to the room at large - or someone Hiccup couldn't see. His eyesight was just starting to come back, black spots swimming.

A girl's voice guffawed from Astrid's side. "\_We've \_got the axe, Miss Hofferson."

"I don't need an axe," Astrid said sadistically. "I'll kill you all with my bare hands if I have to."

There was a certain dignity in a girl pledging to murder someone who'd knocked you out, despite just having had a lengthy conversation about the possible repercussions.

"How did they-?" Hiccup tried to ask. "How long was I-"

Astrid's fingertips found his wrist, cold. "They knocked you out from behind and I was afraid they were going to try to eat you or something-

"Hey!" He couldn't see the source of the voice, but they sounded angry. "We aren't \_cannibals. \_And especially Hiccup, come on! There's not even any meat there!"

"I took one down, over there." Hiccup felt her nod his direction, and he blinked, just making out a slumped mass in the corner. "But one of them had this other thing - like, a magic cylinder or something and it \_burnedâ€¦|\_"

"Mace," a voice supplied.

"It was not a mace," Astrid snapped. "I \_know\_ what one of \_those\_ looks like, thank you very much."

Hiccup coughed, and tried again. "And how long was I...?"

"Not long enough for me to stop screaming at them," Astrid said darkly, and Hiccup decided it was no longer time for questions.

"Listen," he made his voice as soothing as possible. "Why don't you guys let us go? We can talk. I can get you guys something to eat. Are you hungry?"

"What are you \_doing\_?" Astrid hissed.

"Trust me," he breathed, and with one very twisted thumb, managed to stroke the inside of her palm.

And despite all the instincts that were screaming at her that \_she\_ was tied up, it was time to spill some blood, \_she\_ did. A thousand times she had sworn Hiccup was wrong, that he was going to get them all killed, and he had proven her completely and totally wrong. If he didn't, he wouldn't be Hiccup.

He could feel the tension in the room shift a little bit. Anyone who hadn't grown up on Berk wouldn't have known where the berry bushes were, or which ones were the poisonous ones. People from gods-knew-how-long into the future probably didn't have any idea how to survive in the frigid, poisonous, and undeniably dangerous Barbaric Archipelago.

And he was betting on that. What he called home had most likely been torture for them, from the moment they dropped out of the sky. They probably hadn't had real food - Astrid may have had a more valid point than she'd realized when she'd talked about cannibalism earlier.

"And I suppose you want us to let you go," one of the female voices said derisively. "To take us to food. While we have you? This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If we let you out, you'll find a way to 's what you \_do.'"\_

Hiccup shrugged as best he could. "We'll stay here. I'll tell you exactly where to go to get something to eat - without even going to the village - and not far from here - and then you can come back and we'll have a nice chat. We'll stay obediently tied up and everything while you're gone, I promise. Trust me, you'll need my help if you want to not end up chewing sticks for dinner. And even some of those can kill you, you know," he told them calmly. "It \_is\_ Berk."

And finally - finally - one of his captors moved into his line of vision. It was a woman, older than him but not too old. Her clothes were woefully misplaced, her hair lank and greasy, and she looked utterly worn out. "He's right," she coughed out. "We need him if we're going rogue."

"Couldn't we just steal some food from the Mead Hall?" another one

argued.

"You really won't be able to pull that off," Astrid advised reasonably, although she was, Hiccup could feel, very tense. The hard muscles of her forearms dug into his back. "There's bound to be minimum twenty Vikings there who really won't appreciate that. But, I mean, stealing from \_Vikings?\_ You're even crazier than us."

"This is really ironic," one said, smiling wonderingly.

"She's right, we'll get pulverized."

"We have to trust them."

"We \_can't, \_he always does this!"

Hiccup, despite himself, was very intrigued. "I always do what? When have I ever been kidnapped on my own island?" The captors - he was beginning to think of them as that, as none of them had volunteered names - didn't appear to have heard him, but were rapidly becoming engrossed in an argument between themselves.

"Do you want to starve? We're lucky we managed to make a fire and not freeze to death."

"Astrid," Hiccup murmured. "When they're distracted, try to wriggle the bonds loose. Can you reach your boot?"

"I've been trying," she whispered. Astrid kept a spare dagger in the lining of her right boot. It wasn't common knowledge, so there was hope she hadn't been completely disarmed. "I just don't think my arm's that long. Think of something else."

And in that moment, he did think of it. It was a horrible it. "Uh, Astrid? Actually, I have a better idea..."

He felt Astrid's face turn just a little, her shoulder bumping his neck, and when she was reassured that the captors were still debating whether to listen to him or not, she returned her attention to him. "Shoot."

"My leg. Has a spring. With a very sharp edge. If I can, like, kneel properly, you and I might be able to pull it off..."

Astrid's back tightened against his shoulder. "Then what?"

"We'll have to find a place to wait," Hiccup whispered. "I won't be able to walk, so it'll have to be kind of close. A smaller cove or something. Then I can call Toothless and let him know what's up." He sighed, slightly. "But we'd still have to wait. We're going to have to pull the spring almost completely out, it'll need repair... and I obviously can't fly or get up without it. We could send you on with Stormfly to find Fish and Snotlout. But I know exactly what you're about to say, so I guess we're just going to have to work around that-"

"I'm not leaving you," she said immediately, then, "Wait for what?" Somehow, Hiccup had managed to concoct another crazy plan, and as little as she liked the idea of Hiccup prying his leg off and attempting to walk through Berk's dark forest with only a leg and a



half (and the idea of taking it off him even less!), it was actually plausible.

"My dad. The reinforcements have got to be getting here at some point. It has be more than an hour since we left..."

"Where's Ruffnut? If we only had Ruffnut we might be able to get out of here by force."

"Just the three of us? Against all of them?"

"Never underestimate the power of Ruffnut's rage."

"For the sake of our lives, though," Hiccup reminded her, "We're going to have to assume she's gone. She didn't make it here or something. We have to get ourselves out of this."

"I know, I know. I just feel like she's going to pop up at the worst possible moment." Astrid tried in vain to think up another plan, then sighed. "Okay, fine. I'll just kind of crouch, and you can tuck your legs under..."

"Wait," he whispered. "We have to wait for them to go first. Otherwise I'm sure they'll notice the obvious empty spot where it used to be. Once we take it apart, I won't even be able to balance on my knees, so..."

Astrid let out something between a huff and a growl. "I hate waiting."

"I know, and I hate being in this cave. Be patient; the timing has to be perfect."

It was, perhaps, fate that the captors finally wrapped up their discussion and came to stand in front of him. There were about eight, all in varying states of disarray. One was holding a large rock with what looked unfortunately like his own blood.

Toothless was not going to be pleased.

"Tell us where the food is," that one said, tossing the rock from hand to hand. Astrid didn't seem inclined to speak, so Hiccup took a deep breath and forced himself to smile as naturally as possible.

"Okay, if you take a left out of this caveâ€¦"

When he finished his instructions, the leader ordered, "Okay, you four come with me. You three stay here and watch them."

Well, that threw a wrench in things.

"No way," one protested. "You won't bring us back anything."

"Don't you trust me?" Had the poor women been in a better state, Hiccup supposed they would have realized the warning tone for what it was.

"No! You've been starving us," one of them groaned. "We have \_nothing to eat,\_ " she reminded the cave, just in case they'd

forgotten.

"Well, someone has to watch them!" The leader, Hiccup noted calmly, was beginning to lose her temper. All the better.

"They're tied up, c'mon! You tied them up yourself, don't you trust your own knots? It's not like they're going to untie them from \_behind their backs.\_"

"Of course I do, \_I \_just know that they're smart enough to find a way," she argued.

"It's not a question of intelligence anymore," a smaller woman snapped, her stomach growling audibly even over the argument. "It's one of wrist flexibility. I sincerely doubt either Hiccup or Astrid has double-jointed wrists. This is just getting ridiculous, and I want to eat." This was the first of the captors, Hiccup noted, who referred to them by their names.

"Fine, let's all go," the leader spat, shooting Hiccup a disgusted look. "\_I've\_ read the books, and he's done this billions of times. You better hope they don't escape."

As they trooped out, Hiccup called after them, "We're from a movie, by the way!"

Hiccup shrugged purely for Astrid's benefit and tried to forget the ordeal ahead of him. "Billions of times, I don't know about that. Alright, we've got to work fast."

Unfortunately for Astrid, though, it turned out that while she crouched and he kneeled as far back as he could (they knocked heads at least twice), he couldn't reach the leg. She could.

Swallowing what she couldn't permit to be nausea, Astrid followed his tentative instructions, biting her lip and trying to be gentle while sure she was tearing her wrists apart.

"Umm, so it's held on, uh - there. Oh, gods, this is so awkward, let's never get captured again - the leather thing? Yep, that's it. There should be straps..."

"I don't plan on being captured again," Astrid grunted. "Ever." A particularly hard twist of her arm had her eyes tearing up and her exclaiming angrily, "Ow!"

"Uh huh," Hiccup said, and for the first time, she noticed he sounded rather hazy too. "Because my part in this is a picnic."

"Sorry," she muttered, and felt her fingertips finally breach the skin. She tore his legging out of the way, opening her space further, and started trying to work his leg off. It was strapped, she could feel, onto his leg with what seemed like pretty soft leather. She tried to ignore what \_it\_ felt like when it brushed the back of her hand.

No sooner than it did, however, did Hiccup make a strange noise and kick out, jabbing her painfully with the semi-attached metal leg. "Oh my gods, what are you doing - what are you \_doing\_, Astrid-"

At the jab, she'd hopped somewhat higher. "I'm not doing anything," she said defensively, but he was breathing hard.

"It \_hurts...\_It's not even there, but it still hurts..."

And suddenly Astrid understood the problem. She'd had an uncle who'd lost an arm, and he'd always gone around reaching with his right arm and nothing happening. She'd been innately curious, as a little girl, and he'd explained that his arm still felt like it was there. She hadn't known it hurt, but Gobber had provided those nasty details afterward. Gobber had never been much for holding back.

Possibly Hiccup, in his pain, didn't remember? She didn't know if now was the right moment to tell him, but was mortally afraid to make another move and hurt him even more. Maybe it was \_her\_ touch that had done this, introduced him to the worst pain he'd ever felt.

She'd tell him later, Astrid decided. For now... "You must have imagined it."

She could tell by the feeling of his shoulders, jammed against hers, that he didn't believe her - might still be having the sensation of his left foot.

"Yeah...I guess... well, you have another strap to the - um, your right - and, um, pull \_gently...\_"

She tried. She truly did. Astrid hooked her fingers inside the leather pocket and yanked, the iron leg clattering to the floor with a terrifyingly loud clatter. She sucked in her breath, and then laughed with joy.

"YES!" Astrid yelled.

"Shush, shush, quiet," Hiccup half-laughed. He sounded strange, Astrid worried. A little woozy. Bad. Still, he managed to tell her what to do. "Okay, so we might have to work together on this part, but if you can squish the spring together enough for it to come out..."

He rearranged himself on the floor, and both of them worked at it for a few minutes. She felt when his breathing evened out, and held the leg down for her while she pushed.

"Up, up," he instructed, "oh-! Never mind, I got it. Okay. Twist to your left- right, sorry. I have this terrible habit of thinking for the right-handed people - the other side has to give just a little bit more..."

"I think it's loosening," she promised.

Amazed at how grateful she was that this stage of the operation required only fingers touching, Astrid tried to obey. "Keep at it," Hiccup encouraged her. "It should only be a few more turns. I think. I didn't make it, so I can't be sure, but we're almost there." After another second, he said, more quietly, "Sorry. I'm not being very helpful in our escape."

"Shut up," she said gently. "You're an idiot. If you didn't think of

this, any of this, we'd still be arguing over what weapon I'd kill them with. Besides, you're the only person I know who comes with tools built in."

"I've been meaning to make some modifications anyway, in the winter the bolt in the joint wiggles in the most \_annoying\_way\_ and the part that goes up and down clicks. I hate the clicking."

He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again, she could hear the grin in his voice. "Do you want to know the best thing about this plan?"

"What?"

"The berry bush I sent them to is poisonous," he laughed. "In about four hours they'll be sicker than they've ever been. They'll be fine by morning. It pays having Gothi as your grandmother."

"You evil mastermind, you," she exclaimed in delight. "I truly did not think you were capable."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment," Hiccup rolled his eyes. "But seriously. Once she sent me to go get them - I was, like, seven - and didn't tell me they were \_poisonous.\_ Never let a seven-year-old eat poisonous berries, Astrid. I totally get that she was trying to make a boy who had eaten something you really don't want to know about throw it back up, but it was horrible. I didn't want to eat for days. "

"Well, that's a nice twist," Astrid said pleasantly. "They were so hungry they were willing to take your word. They'll be throwing up for \_hours.\_" \_She gave the spring an even harder jerk, and to her complete surprise, it popped out into her palm.

"I did it!" she cried. "Okay, can you cut through the rope?"

"Gimme it," he wiggled to catch it. It was a spring, he reminded himself. Just a spring. It felt like just a spring, but it also felt, in an obscure and bothersome way, like he was using his own bones to cut his bonds.

Astrid waited with bated breath, feeling him struggle to saw through the first filament of the rope.

"If I end up cutting you, I'm really sorry already," Hiccup apologized.

"You better not," she threatened. "I'll take you prisoner."

They both burst out laughing. "Normally I'd be terrified of that," Hiccup snickered, "yet at this exact moment I can't help but feel that's an idle threat."

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. I'm unpredictable."

"I know that." The rope started to fray against her wrist. She pictured his face, his eyes narrowed in concentration. "I'm almost there," his voice floated over her. "And it should beeee goingggg...\_now\_!" The rope snapped. Astrid scrambled up, stretching luxuriously, closing her eyes in the bliss of free movement.

She heard Hiccup make a sound, and opened her eyes. He was still sitting on the floor, left knee looking small and sad and...well, awkward, holding the remnants of his leg in his hand. The skin on the right side of his head was slightly split, blood thickly closing the break. "D'you think we should try and hold on to this? Gobber and I can fix it, obviously, but you'll need both hands and I'm gonna have to hop..."

"I can put in in my boot," she said, reaching out her hand for it and making room from where she retrieved her dagger. It was clumsy and strained the stitches - oh, would she be hearing about this tomorrow - but the point was, it worked.

"Thanks, Astrid." She stood waiting, and then realized he was looking up at her.

"It's nothing. I owe you." She tucked it in safely and grabbed his hand. Did he know how to get up? Bracing her feet, she carefully levied him to his foot, watching as his color drained slowly out of what she could only imagine was fear.

"It's okay," she said, trying to be reassuring. "I won't let you fall."

Although he still looked as white as a draugr, he managed a tight smile. "You and Toothless. What did I need a leg for in the first place? Now I have two valets."

"I think I'm higher than a valet," she scoffed. "Let's go." And they went. It was quicker going than she'd thought, with him attempting to make big hops and holding on to both her and the wall.

They didn't spare any time to look around, and both of them took a deep, relieved breath at the lip of the cave where they could see the stars and the flickering lights of the village.

"We made it," Astrid breathed.

"We always do." She let go of his forearm to grab his hand, and he squeezed back before he coughed and let go.

"We, um, we should go. Not that, um, that wasn't nice or anything, just, um, you know. Tight schedule."

"Uh, yeah, um, where?"

"There's a cove a little ways to the south. We should be okay there. Man, Toothless is going to kill me."

"I still might," she reminded him. "We were in a lot of trouble back there." Although her words were easy, he stiffened.

"We still are. Look." He pointed, and Astrid whipped around back to the cave. The women were on their way back, troubling to be quiet, each cradling what looked like a mound of berries in their shirts.

"OYYYYYY!"

"There's my dad," Hiccup muttered. The women were panicking, berries cascading to the ground. They turned as Stoick thundered out of the treeline on the opposite side of the clearing, torch in one hand and battle-hammer in the other.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH ME BOY, YOU HAGS?"

"They're going to run," Hiccup said suddenly. "Even they've gotta know they can't hold out against my dad. They're going to run, and we have to get out of here before a fight starts. Now!"

"I'm going to run," Astrid said. "Can you sort of gimp with me?"

"Probably not, but I can try. I've got this," he told her, trying to be confident. Thank the gods, the trees grew thickly in this part of the forest, and with Astrid not really running but kind of jogging along, she and Hiccup managed to make decent time.

They reached the cove within minutes, a tiny and far-reaching inlet from Hiccup's own preferred cove. He knew it well enough, but it was pitch-black without the light from the fire or a torch, and as soon as they slid down the embankment, Astrid attempting to keep their balance, and failing, they landed in a tangled heap and stayed there, quiet.

"You hear that screaming?" Astrid said dreamily. "That's Mom. I can just see it now. My axe used to be hers, you know-"

"I do know, actually-"

"Just one stroke through the neck..."

"Astrid, that's a little...terrifying."

"I'm never going to forgive them for everything they've done," she said fiercely. "Tuffnut, Ruffnut, you..."

"I know," he replied. "Speaking of Ruffnutâ€¦is thatâ€¦?"

"AYYYYYYYYYYYYY!" Compared to their own hushed voices, Ruffnut's battle cry was ear-piercing. She dropped into the cove, javelin high, and two earthshaking thumps hit the ground after her.

Astrid stared at Hiccup. In the darkness, she could see his pale green eyes expand to enormous size. Through the darkness, he was trying to locate the shape of-

"Toothless!" Hiccup cried as the dragon pounced on him, knocked him to the ground, and started licking his face. He whined and snuffled at the side of Hiccup's head, licking the blood away, and then turned to stare at the empty, leg-less spot beneath his left knee. "I'm fine," Hiccup promised. Toothless' pupils narrowed dangerously. "Mostly." Hiccup sighed. "Look, bud, you can't win them all - well, at least \_I\_ can't-"

Stormfly danced in front of Astrid, keening.

"Ruffnut?"

"Present!"

"Where have you been?" Astrid wanted to be angry, but was too relieved to find that Ruffnut had been around the whole time that she simply couldn't work it up.

"One ran from me. I got her in the end."

"Umâ€¦"

"Oh, she's alive," she reassured Hiccup. "She actually threw up in fear when I found her next to this big bush...The clause is intact. Mostly." She looked at him, calculating, for a moment, before adding, "Besides, if I'd killed her, her punishment would be over. I'm not finished with them yet."

"Ruff!"

"Oh, don't worry about it." Ruffnut said airily, tossing her dagger in the air and catching it. "Hey, Astrid, you want to help me get the rest?"

"Oh, gods, yes," Astrid breathed, then glanced at Hiccup and made a show of shrugging. "I mean, if we can even find them. Chief's been having it out."

"What!" Ruffnut exploded. "They're \_mine\_!"

"They're all of ours now," Hiccup told her in a more ... well, evil tone of voice than he usually used. "So, did you ambush them at the berries or something?"

Ruffnut gave a toothy smile. "You bet I did."

Suddenly overcome with anxiety, Hiccup hastened to ask, "You didn't eat any of them, did you?"

"You think I had time to snack?" she squawked. "I was busy trying to kill them!"

"Well, that's a relief," he told her, only partially sarcastic. "Although if we're competing for who got them first, it's me. Those berries are poisonous."

"Oohhh," Ruffnut said appreciatively.

"We should get you back to the village," Astrid eyed his leg.

"Good idea. I'll just get on Toothless. We'll walk. You two can go on Stormfly, and we'll be back in a jiffy."

"Go back?" Ruffnut laughed. "We're going to put you to bed and go have \_fun.\_"

"Whatever. Sounds good to me." Hiccup yawned and resisted the impulse to touch his stump. "Just as long as you don't-" He fell asleep then and there, and Astrid and Ruffnut looked at each other, smiling despite themselves. Toothless softened and began picking his way up

and out of the cove.

"I think he's got it," Ruff said, her eyes sparkling. "Are you ready?"

"You know, we haven't taken advantage of those cages yet," Astrid mentioned.

"Oh, I love how you think, my friend." She smirked. "Let's go catch our prey."

Astrid grinned sideways at Ruffnut. "I call the one with the big rock."

.

The next day dawned with Hiccup exhausted, sore, and in an extremely cheerful mood that only increased every time he remembered how the Vikings had bested the captors the night before. He spent a few hours retelling the story to Gobber while repairing the leg, who seemed to find the whole thing hilarious (he even got Hiccup laughing for a moment) but impressed with Hiccup's ingenuity (and explained that he'd unfortunately probably suffer phantom pains a few more times, which he was understandably \_so not looking forward to.\_) By the next afternoon, even Astrid and Ruffnut, who had been out all night chasing their prey, had caught on to his good mood and joined the rest of the gang in the training ring to teach their lesser demons.

"Today, students," Hiccup started, pacing across the training ring (his poor, abused leg twinged, but he ignored it- nothing could spoil his buoyancy. Ow. Nothing.) "You have an opportunity to teach \_us.\_" Thousands of eyes followed him at dizzying speeds, almost hungrily. A low murmur like a flock of annoyed Terrible Terrors started to flare up. Toothless plodded along after him, frowning as Hiccup suddenly whirled back in the other direction and Toothless had to reverse to follow him.

"I'll be honest here...we have a hard time understanding the concept of AUs, especially 'modern' AUs." Hiccup helplessly grasped at the air and words that made sense. "We gather that we reside in our present but you guys' past. So modern AUs place us in the time you guys live in. We know there's other dimensions-there's all these pathways through the Yggdrasil, I mean... there's a ton of stories about them. You guys must come from one of the other eight realms. But I'm getting off track. I'm not here to teach you theology.

"If you have questions," he added hastily, seeing confused looks and hands creeping up. "Gothi or my dad or Fishlegs or even Gobber- no, not Gobber, that was a bad idea. But the other ones can probably help." Hiccup was momentarily distracted by the pleading look in Fishlegs' eyes. He really was making Fishlegs do too much lately. "Okay, just disregard everything. Go to Gothi." When this was over, he vowed to bring Fishlegs a jar of his grandmother's elderberry jam, a centuries-old recipe that she guarded jealously and only made on special occasions. She made a ton of it after his mother died, which is why he didn't like it nearly as much as the rest of the village.

Besides, he kind of wanted to know what his old axe-wielding but



still absolutely terrifying grandmother would make of a few impudent writers. Maybe a rug.

"Anyway," he continued. "We're going to pass out paper and charcoal. Please define in the best terms you can an AU, modern AUs, and explain their appeal in two hundred words or less. Thank you." He shouted over the already rising buzz: "You can talk \_quietly\_!"

It dimmed down some. Kind of. Hiccup was feeling tolerant (today), so he let it slide.

"This should be interesting," Astrid smirked. "I bet we get at least two passionate thousand word essays."

"I bet five," Ruffnut chimed in.

"I hope not, we already have a gajillion papers to grade," Fishlegs grumbled. Maybe two jars of jam, even though Hiccup was going to have to grovel for it...unless she had enough fun with whoever was stupid enough to go to her. Maybe he could appeal to her sense of humanity by pointing out Stoick's attempts at food. There's a reason Hiccup took over cooking when he was eight.

"Hey, at least we'll learn something," Hiccup said reasonably. Fishlegs visibly brightened.

"I don't want to learn about \_them,\_ " Tuffnut moaned, and Ruffnut took this as her cue to bully him and Snotlout into collecting the papers. Every time a hand brushed her brother he shrieked and leapt back if the touch was acid. Ruffnut happily observed terror on her brother's face and guilt on the countenances of his tormentors. As it should be.

"Okay, class dismissed for today," Hiccup announced. "we're going to read these and revisit the topic tomorrow morning, with a more concrete set of principles to go over. BEFORE YOU LEAVE-"

The mass, which was already up and ambling out, stopped and turned guiltily back. Hiccup was learning slowly that having a Night Fury behind you (who, he was told, growled threateningly and reverted to innocence the moment he looked) was a good way to garner the attention of inmates. Astrid glowered in her uniquely Astrid way. "Don't deface any property or assault anyone. Oh, and Haggar explicitly told me if he sees another writer riding his sheep in the moonlight, he's going to get his spear sharpened."

"You're messing with a man's sheep?" Snotlout cried, outraged. "That is too far!"

"All livestock off limits," Hiccup said firmly. "If the dragons have to stay away, so do the rest of you. \_And you have to stay away from the dragons!\_ Okay, now you're dismissed. Try not to be a destructive force in our society. Thanks."

When the last ambled out, with a groan of, "God, I am \_starving\_," Hiccup raised his eyebrows at his friends. "Ready?"

"I guess so," Tuff shivered.

"It's just writing, you baby," Ruffnut scoffed, but there was a

tenderness in her eyes you wouldn't pick up on if you didn't know her.

"Hey, ease up on my man," Snotlout defended, putting his hand on Tuff's shoulder.

"This is why TuffLout is a fanfiction couple."

"Shut up! It's strictly bromance!"

"You just called him your man."

"Not like, my man, like my man. You got me?"

"I don't know about the rest of you, but that change in inflection really enlightened me," Hiccup said dryly. "Well, let's get to work."

"Do we have to?" Tuffnut whined. "I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry," Ruffnut rolled her eyes. "But I am tooâ€|"

"Food run?" Tuffnut said hopefully.

Hiccup hesitated. Snacks would be niceâ€|he was kind of hungry too...he could go for some beef stew from the Mead Hall...some nice bread...

"Okay, fine," he relented. "But you are getting us food and coming straight back, understood? We don't need a repeat of the Incident yesterday. Either Incident," he added, catching Ruff's unashamed gaze.

"They deserved it," Ruff said with a perfectly straight face.

Hiccup sighed. "Ruff, I'm serious. They signed a waiver but I'm pretty sure there's a clause in there that says we can't damage them permanently."

"But temporarily?" she asked hopefully.

"\_Ruffnut!" \_

"Fine, fine, Bossyboot."

He rolled his eyes and picked up his first essay. Tuff and Ruff rambled off, arguing companionably.

Fishlegs shook his head. "How do their parents handle both of them at once all the time?"

"Because their mom is only person they're scared of," Astrid answered. "They know she'll take prisoners if they don't obey her."

"Maybe we need to recruit her," Hiccup murmured. "I don't know about the rest of you, but every time I can't see the twins I get this apprehensive feeling that won't go away."

"Actuallyâ€¦"

"Yeahâ€¦"

"I know exactly what you meanâ€¦"

"That's probably not a good thing."

"Do you remember that time-"

"Of course I remember that time, it was \_two days ago.\_"

"I wasn't even talking about that, I was- actually, that works."

Their conversation was momentarily interrupted by a muffled scream from inside one of the old dragon cages. The teens turned to Hiccup, whose eyes widened slightly in surprise. Astrid said calmly, "Oh, don't worry about it. That's just Gladys. The one who knocked you out." She'd expected Hiccup to protest, but instead he just took a small breath and continued, "Well, they do keep things...interesting."

"There's an understatement."

"Has anyone ever thought about what's going to happen when one of them gets married and moves out?"

"Too scary," Snotlout shuddered.

"I think Ruffnut would snap," Fishlegs mused in a tone of voice Hiccup decided was entirely too calm for the subject at hand. "Like, go on a spree and take everyone on the island out."

"You know, I'm more inclined to think it's be Tuffnut," Astrid returned. "If you just look into his eyes, you get this...\_sense\_, of overwhelming insanity."

"And Ruffnut doesn't have that?" Hiccup asked skeptically.

"Wellâ€¦ I'm not exactly saying she \_doesn't\_..."

"All I'm saying...whoever Ruff marries is gonna have a tough time, but \_Tuff\_ had better never get married."

.

Long hours later, Hiccup had compiled a fairly concise list. Simpler was better with this group. The more information you threw at them, the more questions they hurled back. Usually uncomfortable questions like why he and Astrid aren't betrothed yet (they were \_fourteen\_, for the gods' sakes! Besides, there was this whole betrothal \_system\_ he really did not want to explain right now) or where he got the scar on his chin (he really couldn't remember) or if trolls really do exist. (Gobber's voice insisted in his mind, "Trolls \_exist\_!" as he answered, "Not on Berk. I can't say what's in the other realms." That of course excited the curiosity of the die-hards, but Hiccup diverted them by pointing out how Toothless was kicking in his sleep. The questions were forgotten and replaced by cooing about \_how cute\_

Toothless was. Toothless was not amused when the hubbub woke him up.)

The list was printed as neatly as he could on the stone wall. On the south end of the island you could find an almost spongy rock that produced chalky dust against stone; when fashioned into a stick it made a decent writing utensil. Then he realized they couldn't read his Norse and felt like a moron.

\_We should teach them our runes, \_he thought vaguely. \_Let them work to accommodate us instead of us accommodating them. \_But that could wait; he'd find time in the syllabus somehow. He didn't know anything for sure â€" maybe the writers would suddenly experience a burst of a skill and their work would become unexpectedly easier. Toothless rolled over and snorted behind him. Hiccup grinned. "You're right, bud. What am I thinking?" He crouched to scratch Toothless' ear. He thumped his head down in ecstasy. "Alright, back to work, bud. For me, anyway. \_You \_have the luxury of napping whenever you want."

Toothless' lips curled up smugly.

"Useless reptile," Hiccup said fondly, giving him one last scratch.

"I want to read the list," Snotlout begged. "You guys are just using me for my visual appeal. I want to teach, too."

Hiccup and Astrid exchanged glances from either side of Snotlout.

\_What can it hurt?\_ his eyes said to her.

\_Snotlout can read?\_ hers said back.

"Um, sure, Snotlout," Hiccup began cautiously. "Just stick to what we wrote down."

"I can \_read, \_Hiccup," Snotlout said impatiently. Hiccup caught Astrid's eye and tried not to laugh.

"Tally ho, then," Astrid smirked.

"I will!" Snotlout swaggered to the front of the class. "Hey, squirts! We worked our butts off reading your essays, which weren't very interesting, by the way-"

"Snotlout!"

"I'm getting to it, keep your leg on - and we compiled a list of basic AU principles to stick to. No interruptions!" He held up a fist. Hiccup coughed and shot his cousin a look. It was supposed to convey many things: \_Don't make fun of me in front of the writers, \_for one, and also, \_You look stupid waving your fist!\_

All Snotlout got out of it was, "Geez, Hiccup, you're no fun," and grumbled on. "Hiccup's got a list of rules for me to tell you weirdoes - here! No matter what imaginary world you stupid little stories take place in, you gotta keep it real with what we're like. I'm dominating! Hiccup's weak and sissy-"(Hiccup coughed again,

louder; Snotlout continued without taking a breath) "â€" and Astrid's...Astrid."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment," Astrid whispered to him behind a hand, echoing his words of last night, and Hiccup snorted and rolled his eyes.

"I can't believe how they're eating it up..."

And it was kind of true that they were. At least some of the girls, though, the dedicated ones. They were leaning on elbows and looking at him hungrily. Most of the others were still squealing and watching Toothless.

If Snotlout was bothered by his patchy audience (if there was one good thing about this, Hiccup thought, it was that he never had to try particularly hard to get their attention), he didn't let on. Hiccup wasn't entirely sure he had noticed at all.

Snotlout cleared his throat obnoxiously and shouted, "Second rule! No stupid stuff with the plots - you know, fluff and cliffhangers and ridiculous trips into the countryside. You gotta cut it down, man, to just the good stuff: the hacking and the killing-"

Unable to help himself, Hiccup found words coming out of his mouth. "Yeah, I'm not sure that's the second rule we agreed on, Sn-"

In a disgusted tone of one explaining the very simple to the very stupid, Snotlout continued, "You can't just write stuff 'cause you feel like it."

A few of his enraptured audience were beginning to perk up at this, a few looking truly angry. The older woman Astrid â€" or had it been Ruffnut? Hiccup was finding it hard to remember between all the accusations those two made â€" had warned him about stood up and protested, "But writing is self-expression. It isn't taught as much in schools these days, and it's a valuable outlet for troubled teenagers. Writing when they need to-"

Astrid cut her off remorselessly, granting Snotlout a uniquely Astrid look of derision.

"Your plot has to beâ€|" she turned and checked the wall behind her, "Concise and plausible no matter the setting or time period of your AU."

Hiccup spotted a few shamed faces looking guiltily between him and Astrid. Um, okay.

"Which reminds me, " Astrid retorted, "plausible. \_ I am not going to get kidnapped. Now, Hiccup on the other hand..."

"Hey!" Toothless' growl coincided with Hiccup's yelp. "As I hope you can see," Hiccup said dryly, "Toothless isn't about to let me get kidnapped. This is not an invitation to try it! Again. You guys all learned your lesson with Tuffnut, right?"

"Yes," they muttered. Ruffnut cackled and high-fived Astrid.

To his horror, he saw tears glistening on a pale cheek. "That just

ruined my new plot bunny baby," a girl sniffled.

"Another question for you," snapped Astrid. "What is all this stuff about \_bunnies?\_ Why would you call an...an \_idea\_ a bunny? When Hiccup gets ideas they're more like...like avenging sea monsters."

"Thank you," Hiccup said quietly, and one girl actually applauded. Another muttered, "\_Awww! They're so cute!" \_

"Stop," Hiccup and Astrid snapped in unison, then turned almost identically pink, grinning embarrassedly at each other

"\_They're so cute,\_" the girl roared.

"Do I need to take you out of class?" Hiccup threatened.

"No," she muttered sullenly. "I'll just write a one-shot later."

"No, actually you won't," Hiccup said pleasantly. "Our sponsors have suspended your accounts- temporarily, of course."

"WHAT?!"

"SETTLE DOWN," Fishlegs screamed. Everything fell uncomfortably silent. "Do you think we get internet access here anyway?!"

"He \_yelled?\_" Astrid couldn't believe it. She touched her forehead in disbelief, feeling faint. "He actually \_yelled?\_"

"I-" Ruffnut stared at him, unable to speak for quite possibly the first time in her life. "I'm finding him, like, 1000 times more attractive right now."

Hiccup looked back at the girls, laughing. "Oh, you two should have seen him the other night. He's in his element."

A wave of Rufflegs shippers squealed. "Shut up," Tuffnut growled. "You filthy muckrakers and your \_shipping-\_"

Snotlout squeezed his shoulder. "Man. Relax. They can't hurt you."

And then the TuffLout shippers.

"Settle down," Fishlegs repeated, perfectly mildly, yet everyone immediately quieted. "Let's get back on topic, please."

A more serious-looking writer in the fourth row adjusted her glasses and looked up inquisitively. "I'm not entirely sure why we call them that," she said solemnly. "It's just the lingo."

"Oh, well, that's always a good reason," Astrid said nastily, and to Hiccup's surprise, he felt something disturbingly like...pride, fluttering in his chest. Astrid was picking up on his sarcasm. A really embarrassing and goofy smile must have been forming on his face because Toothless butted into his legs and knocked him off balance.

"Anyway," he coughed, "The same rules as always apply in an AU. Nothing can be done without real explanation, and that brings me to rule three: anything that we say is wrong, or have said, or will say in the future, it isn't magically right as soon as you change the setting. Dragons as humans, for instance, or Toothcup-"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth did Hiccup realize his mistake. "Oh, no..."

Astrid just managed to clap her hands over her ears as the sentence registered to the crowd.

"WHAAAAAT?!"

"Oh great, here we go again," Fishlegs sighed.

## 6. In Which They Learn About Dragons Part I

**\*\*Hey, there. Been a while, hasn't it? Life's been crazy busy for both WW and I, but I can say that we're working hard at getting back on the horse. Extra fun chapters coming up! \*\***

**\_\*\*Hello my little pupils. So I've been insane busy with school (the joys of AP classes) play practice (Peter Pan) and newspaper (I run our website). But I promise so much beautiful pandemonium to \*\*\_\*\*\_come.\_ \*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>6: In Which They Learn About Dragons<strong>

"Hiccup," Astrid warned. "Toothless looks like he's about to pounce-"

Hiccup's hand found Toothless' head. "He's \_fine, \_Astrid-"

"And you're not looking so promising either-"

"Can't you just trust me? I'm not going to \_maim \_them or anything," he said pointedly.

"I trust you, I do, I just know how you are- and how he is- are you sure he's not going to-?"

"He's fine! We're going to handle this maturely, right Bud?"

Toothless growled.

"See?" Hiccup crossed his arms and raised his eyebrows at her.

"That wasn't reassuring."

"I've got this, Astrid. I totally have this."

"Okayâ€¦!"

Ruffnut snickered. "Sucker. Toothless is going to flip out and eat them all. It's going to be awesome."

Ruffnut had not quite forgiven the writers for the Tuffnut debacle. Fishlegs looked at her nervously, then piped up, "Umm, guys? They're \_watching us.\_"

Astrid whipped back around. It was true. The writers were watching in silence.

They stared at the writers. The writers stared at them. The silence pounded exquisitely until finally-

"I didn't mean for it to go so far," a remarkably tall blonde girl burst into hysterics. "But I got so many reviews!"

"That doesn't make it okay!" Hiccup yelled as Toothless shot a fire bolt. Several people fainted; barely anyone \_didn't \_ scream; Toothless' resulting roar seemed to shake the very stones they stood on; and a huge flash of lightning tore the sky in two, along with a earth-shaking clap of thunder. Hiccup's eyes snapped to the sky guiltily. He really was getting sure the sponsors were reminding him they were always watching. \_Calm down, Hiccup, \_he told himself. \_Keep it together, or you're just Ruffnut.\_

"Okay," Hiccup called to the students. "We're going to make this very, very simple. Dragons are not magical. Dragons don't come in various different types of their species. And lastly, no matter how much you want it, dragons don't do anything you haven't already seen."

A ruckus of confused and enraged shrieks and screams erupted from the fangirls, and Hiccup smiled blithely and continued talking. "There is \_not\_ and never has been anything remotely close to a 'White Fury,' or any other type of Night Fury. Ever. There is not some secret island way north of here where evil people hoard Night Furies - well, if there is, I guess we'll find out eventually, but for the time being we prefer to stay terrified of Toothless as a single entity. The unholy offspring of lightning and Death and all. I mean, I could be really wrong, but I'm pretty sure Hel's got better things to do."

"They are cool," Fishlegs piped up in defense. "The dragon manual can tell you all these awesome details. But yeah, Hiccup's right. They don't speak - human language anyway, we're fairly certain they have their own ways of communication - and they don't transform into humans or something ridiculous like that."

As gasps shot through the crowd, one girl leapt up, tears streaming down her cheeks, and yelled, "You're lying!" Astrid rolled her eyes.

"You're right, we \_are,\_" she said earnestly, as the twins snorted and cackled behind her. Then she snapped, "Where did all that ... that ridiculous stuff come from anyway? Our movie is \_nice\_ and natural and family-friendly."

"Well, you know," Hiccup intoned lowly to his friends. "Most of it."

Astrid shot him a look before she could smile, and turned back to the crowd just as a fifteen-year-old raised her hand.



Astrid tipped her head and glared. "What?"

"Umm...well...I was just wondering...why are White Furies so...bad?" the last word was a squeak.

Astrid threw up her hands in disgust, then whirled back to Hiccup, panic-stricken. "They just are," she threw over her shoulder. "Deal with it."

"\_You\_ deal with it," a boy said back.

Hiccup grabbed Astrid's arm and dragged her back- or attempted to. 'What did you say, you maggot?" she was shouting.

"Astrid," Hiccup groaned. "For once- can it just- be easy- OW!" her free arm had whipped into the side of his face. He decided not to consider whether it was on purpose. "Toothless- \_help\_" Hiccup hissed. "Ruff- Tuff-come on, one of you-"

Toothless rolled his eyes, retracted his teeth, and clamped his gums lazily and gently on Astrid's leg. He yanked her back and then released her; Hiccup and Astrid both toppled over. Toothless started laughing.

"Traitorous reptile," Hiccup muttered, extending a hand to Astrid. She instead smacked his arm before getting up with as much dignity as she could. The eruption of laughter abruptly silenced as she glared at the writers.

Toothless nudged Hiccup up, his eyes wide. He pointed his ears toward Astrid.

"I know, Bud," Hiccup sighed, dusting off his tunic. "Okay," he called out. "Let's get back on topic. Dragons don't talk, White furies aren't real, um...it really hurts when Astrid hits youâ€|"

"Not sorry," she muttered. "You got in my way."

"How many times am I going to have to bring up the no permanent damage clause?" He paused momentarily. "And I \_always\_ seem to be in your way."

"That clause is so unrealistic," Astrid huffed, disregarding the rest of his sentence.

"Well, we signed it. That's all there is to it." Hiccup kneaded his knuckle against his throbbing temple. "Oh, yeah. Dragons in AUs. This is a less precise art. We're- open to your opinions. To a degree," he added quickly.

"A very small degree," Fishlegs added from behind them. "One of the finer points of writing is \_realism.\_ If it's not realistic, then no one will want to read it."

An angry shout erupted from somewhere in back. "I wrote a whole saga!" A blond girl screamed, red-faced, pointing a furious finger at Fishlegs. "And I have the most reviews in Fanfiction history!"

At this, a grown woman stood. "Now that's uncalled for," she frowned. "As if you could know that! There are a \_lot\_ of better writings out there than your \_"saga."\_

"Oooh," Tuffnut said, not troubling to keep his voice down. "I like this one! Catfight!"

"\_Tuffnut!" \_Hiccup hissed. "Don't encourage-"

"And \_what\_ does this have to do with dragons?" Fishlegs muttered sadly to Meatlug. "Girl, this was my time to shine..." He frowned. "This \_always\_ happens! They're never going to learn \_anything\_ this way..."

"You do not have the most reviews!" a girl shouted, standing up and squaring her shoulders. "Unless..."

"It can't beâ€¦!"

"\_She \_couldn't be hereâ€¦!"

"What?" Five reptilian and five human pairs of eyes swiveled to look at Hiccup, who turned to look at the boastful girl herself.

"It's you," he gasped, and then calm, peaceful, reasonable Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III surprised everyone. (One or two of the fangirls fainted dead away.) "Get. Out," Hiccup said very composedly. Steadily. "Or I'm going to cut your head off." His left arm moved and snatched Astrid's axe right out of her hand.

"Hiccup, what are you doing?" Astrid screamed, but even she could barely hear herself over the rising pandemonium.

"What?"

"Hiccup?"

"Did he finally snap?"

"What's going on?"

Toothless pushed the twins over and bolted in front of Hiccup, simultaneously knocking over with his tail a good ten writers dashing forward to make sure Hiccup wasn't about to drop dead and shooting a plasma bolt into the following mass. The crowd dropped as one onto the cobblestones with an ear-shattering shriek.

"Don't let her escape!" Hiccup roared, jumping on Toothless and giving new meaning to taking off. Astrid tripped over an arm, kicked a face and stumbled to Stormfly; by the time she mounted she could barely see a black blur on the horizon that vanished in less than five seconds.

"I'm going to kill you," Astrid snarled under her breath. "Thank you, \_idiot." \_She turned back to the gang. "Mount up, we have to find them and find out what's going-"

A clap of thunder roared through the training ring; everyone in the vicinity covered their faces. There was a thud, almost like the sound

of a well-practiced jump from the top of the arena to the stone floor. And then a familiar voice spoke.

"Oh, great, Astrid, she hacked in."

There was a new voice - one Astrid couldn't recognize, but definitely feminine. "Did we ever hire that guy? The one with the anti-virus thinga-"

The first girl moaned. "They lied to me! All of them! They said Windows Eight had it's own protection and I could finally ditch Norton!"

The new girl paused for a second, choosing to ignore the outburst.  
"Did Hiccup-"

"He did." A grim pause. "He's so not going to remember the clause."

"Well," the second voice said helpfully. "She broke in, she didn't sign the corresponding agreement. Technically, no one is liable here."

"Thank Thor for legal agreements," the voice sighed, ("And that lawyer.") and came into Astrid's view. She cringed.

"Hi, Astrid," Wordwielder said apologetically. "Sorry about Hiccup's mental breakdown. Have you met the other Astrid?"

## 7. In Which They Learn About Dragons Part 2

\*\*Hello my dears. As usual, it's all on me, but finally my play has ended and I'm home before six again. It's all kinds of glorious. As glorious as you will hopefully find this chapter. Over to my partner in crime.\*\*

**\*\*Now this was an intense writing session in early November. Thank Odin for us it made it up now, because I won't have a minute. So here's part two. Loaded with fun for us. Next chapter, the cleanup of this beautiful mess we made...\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>In Which They Learn About Dragons Part  
II<span>\*\*

"The other Astrid?" Astrid, the real Astrid, turned to scrutinize the girl at Wordwielder's side. "What do you mean, other?" Wordwielder looked almost exactly the same as she had the one and only time she and Astrid had met - cheery and confident, dressed in odd clothes with dark, braided hair.

The \_"other"\_ Astrid was taller than her, with long brown hair pulled into a lazy ponytail, a loose shirt with some design on it - was that \_the Academy's symbol?!\_ - and shorts. Striking her rumpled air jarringly were elegant rimless glasses perched on her nose and her sardonic smile.

"I'm Astrid Goes For A Spin," said the other Astrid, not offering her

hand for a shake, which was probably wise. Astrid wasn't in the mood for pleasantries. "As we all know you've figured out by now, this isn't my own name, but I liked this enough to go by it just about everywhere on the internet."

"Plus I can't just call her Astrid Goes For A Spin," Wordwielder added. "That's so long. It has to be Astrid. Ooh, I hope that doesn't get confusing."

"My song," squeaked Astrid, dumbstruck. "You took my song!"

"I didn't take it," the girl shrugged. "It's still yours. When I shut the top of my computer, I'll go back to being regular old me."

This was stretching Astrid's thin patience to the extreme. "What happened to Hiccup?" she demanded. "Why did he - just - go OFF like that?"

Wordwielder hesitated, then placed a gentle hand on Astrid's upper arm. "He's gone after a particularly notorious writer. Also, we needed to get him - well, out of the way - for a chapter or so so we could talk."

Astrid's fingers itched for an axe. The other Astrid chuckled. "Yeah, no. You won't be needing that today."

"I know no one actually read the contract," Wordwielder continued. "We wrote in the suspension of the accounts and a certain protective clause for ourselves as well. That was mostly against the fanfictioners, but we should be protected from the rest of you too."

"What?" Astrid snapped.

"I don't think you can kill us- that is, if you do, it should reset the time continuum back to one hour before the writers began to arrive. So in theory, we can't die."

Astrid had a feeling that if Hiccup had been there, he would have had some sarcastic remark to make, but she herself was too furious to even indulge in a pang.

"In theory?" Fishlegs asked, looking up with interest.

"Welllllllâ€¦I've gotten pretty good at playing with the space-time continuum, but I'm not, like, the Doctor," Wordwielder shrugged. "I also may have guaranteed that we die early deaths in some other fashion. Who can say? Time is weird. But yeah, I think that won't happen."

\*\*\*\*"It's a good thing we believe cleaning up our poor fandom is worth the maybe consequences," Astrid Goes For A Spin added. "For instance, if this was Hogwarts, we wouldn't bother. Now that fandom is so hopeless..."

\*\*\*\*"I know," Wordwielder tsked like a mother looking upon a terrible mess. "But we have a mere five thousand or so fics to look through for improvement here. So!" She clapped her hands.

"Five thousand?" Astrid asked, slightly shocked. "Five thousand?"

Wordwielder ignored her. "Children, Hiccup and Toothless - yes, I know, the focal points of many of your obsessions, sorry but not sorry - will be gone. For a while. I'm not entirely sure how long, actually, but I guess we'll find out eventually. But don't worry- me and Astrid Goes- Okay, I'm just calling you Astrid the Second- we totally have everything under control."

"Did you really...just...get rid of Hiccup and Toothless - just like that?" asked Fishlegs timidly.

"No, of course not!" They replied almost frighteningly in sync.

"How could we do such a thing? I love the two of them to death, they're my favorite bromance," Wordwielder emphasized the last word very strongly.

"Okay, not exactly to death," Astrid Goes For A Spin corrected as fangirls' eyes widened. "Uh, how about this? We love them to... to pieces. We love them to bits...we love them to cookies..." She shrugged helplessly. "Point of the story: we're fangirls too. At one point, we were bad fanfiction writers too - we pretend we weren't as bad as you, but some of my first stories? Yeah, mortifying - but we, through, um, dedication to the cause, managed to rise above that. The characters even respect us."

"Honestly, we probably weren't as bad as most of you," Wordwielder added. "But my first story makes me want to tear out my eyes- not literally!" she added hastily, seeing shocked faces.

"So we've decided to use our good writing skills benevolently. Because-" here, Astrid Goes For A Spin sighed. "Really, the fanfiction is getting worse. The quality is leaving the fandom. No one is committed to the original, wholesome, and completely non-incestuous world of the movie."

"The movie is about courage and friendship, you twisted fiends," Wordwielder cried out. "And for the love of Thor, Toothcup? What ever suggested beastiality?"

"Well, actually-" someone started to say.

"Shut up," Wordwielder said pleasantly. "It'll go better for you."

It was a mark of the fear the bad writers held for the two that not one more dedicated fangirl cried out in support of their favorite disturbing pairing.

"Good little pets," Wordwielder grinned at Astrid Goes For A Spin. "Where should we begin?"

Astrid, who had remained dumbstruck after the five thousand - so many people were actually writing stories about them? - shook her head and reentered the conversation, things clicking back into place. "Are you our sponsors?" She crossed her arms and glared.

"Well, you knew about me- to a degree. I daresay the whole

'she-stabbed-Watson-in-a-bloody-alley' debacle in the middle of our introductions didn't make the best impression," Wordwielder said apologetically. "And he's fine, by the way." She cleared her throat and glanced at Astrid Goes For A Spin. "Also by the way, I think it's time for, um, your turn, according to my tradition..."

The other whipped around in shock, looking almost fearfully toward the entrance to the training ring. "You didn't...get any of my...characters to come, did you?"

"I didn't get them, but, well, Dragon Keeper Hermione is kind of missing Hiccup nowadays. You haven't updated in a while, and I promised her-"

At this, Astrid Goes For A Spin let out a low moan and stalked toward the grate. A moment later, she was back, towing along a girl with bushy brown hair - whom many of the fangirls jumped up and screamed at - to Wordwielder.

She stopped abruptly. The girl didn't smile. "Hermione, I am so sorry that Wordwielder did this to you. Wordwielder, apologize."

"I didn't want to bring her!" Wordwielder whined. "She stole Harry's invisibility cloak and grabbed on the last second. I was going to send her back but she started crying! You know I can't handle crying!"

"I didn't steal it, I borrowed it," Hermione corrected.

"She never used to steal before she met Hiccup," muttered Astrid Goes For A Spin distractedly.

"And did I do that?" Wordwielder pointed out.

"No, but you did bring her into this mess." Astrid Goes For A Spin gestured at the mob, all craning to see Hermione and whispering. A few were cat-calling and screaming for autographs. "And on top of that, Hiccup isn't even here-"

"Yes, and you should go," Wordwielder supplied. "Don't you have a Transfiguration exam Monday to study for?"

Hermione scowled. "I thought I was supposed to bring Hiccup back-"

"No, no," assured Astrid Goes For A Spin. "You just stay happily in suspended animation until I have time to write your next scene..."

"Um, no, that's not part of this arc at all, it'll screw up the thing we have with-" Wordwielder stopped talking abruptly.

Astrid, the original, real, flesh-and-blood (she wasn't so sure that these others were human) Viking girl, strode forward and grabbed Hermione by the arm urgently. "Are you a victim of theirs' too?"

Hermione shook her arm free. "Kind of. Maybe. Astrid Goes For A Spin isn't bad to me most of the time...but she's so mean to Hiccup. He wanted to stay back at Berk with you and Toothless and his dad, I

\_know\_, and the only reason she lets me hang out with him is because of the amnesia thing-

"Hey, let's not go so in-depth!" Wordwielder laughed. She and Astrid Goes For A Spin exchanged panicked glances.

"No need to ruin my dramatic reveals, ladies," Astrid Goes For A Spin said, but Hermione turned her back to listen to Astrid's furious reply.

"\_AMNESIA?\_ Are you \_kidding\_ me? That was one of the things on the list! The minor list, but still, the \_list.\_ Fishlegs, you're with me, right? Ruff, Tuff? They call themselves \_writers\_, but they're doing it themselves!"

"Oh, yeah, it was," Wordwielder groaned. "Well, so was fluff and I am one guilty fluff sinner."

Astrid Goes For A Spin nodded. "It's a condition. But, um, pupils? Yeah, pupils - the moral of my embarrassment is: to work at it. It's not always the thought that counts when the story turns out terrible."

"I think it's time for me to go work on creating a time loop to fix this mess," Wordwielder muttered to Astrid Goes For A Spin. "We have got to get her out of here before Hiccup comes back with her. Then all Hel will break lose if we have three angry girls and a mass of fans on our hands. Distract them, this might be sort of...creative."

"You're right," Astrid Goes For A Spin concurred. "If our Hiccup comes back and sees my Hermione, he might start to duplicate - and if he does it for \_us\_, we might have a full-scale riot of fangirl Hiccups in a minute..."

With that, Wordwielder hopped onto Hookfang. "Hey, big boy," she cooed. "Fly. Now. Without Sno-"

"Hey," Snotlout yelled. "What are you doi-"

Wordwielder kicked him and cried, "GO, HOOKFANG!"

Hookfang knocked over his owner and went in the wrong direction, bouncing happily. Wordwielder tried desperately to hang on and grabbed a compact mirror from her bag. She used the light to steer Hookfang sort of like cattle into the air and towards the woods- Hookfang blundered over the trees and flopped down into a cove quite a bit earlier than Wordwielder would have liked- she was thrown right off into a large pine tree.

"OWWWWWWWW THIS IS NOT FUNNY THOR AND ALL THE REST OF YOU WATCHING RIGHT NOW!" She shrieked. She twisted herself out of the branches. Hookfang appeared to be stalking his reflection in a small tarn.

"Okay boy," Wordwielder coaxed, "I need you to flame up and we're going to put on a little performance. I'll get you a giant fish for dinner if you do it."

Hookfang cocked his head. Wordwielder sighed and compromised, "Okay,

three HUGE fish."

Hookfang flamed up.

"Good boy, good ferocious boy. Now let me just see what I have in my bag to pull this off."

Astrid watched all of this from an amused distance. "I guess you did all right with training Hookfang, Snotlout," she said, smirking. Hermione, at her side, giggled, then vanished right into thin air.

Wordwielder wrote into existence about twelve thunderclaps, growing louder and louder, and a minor earthquake (to the displeasure of the villagers. Up on the chief's hill, Stoick's woodcarving knife slipped and gouged deeply into this throne.), and then directed Hookfang to fly behind the clouds, where his flame glowed eerily. Just for fun, she rained a little fire down.

A stronger quake, and through her Newspaper recorder, a maniacal laugh seemingly from nowhere.

A girl screamed.

"\_Silence, mortals!\_"

"Thor?" Tuffnut whispered. "Save me from the fangirls, Thor!"

"\_Listen and learn! The worlds are intermixing closely. We. Are. Watchingggg..."\_

She pressed end on her recording and whispered, "I think we got em, Hookfang. Three big fish, I promise. Now Let's get back."

He almost threw her in enthusiasm.

"Aren't you jealous that she gets to do all that cool elemental stuff?" Fishlegs whispered to Astrid Goes For A Spin curiously. "That's, like, awesome to the max! I've never even seen a \_dragon\_ that could do any of that!"

Astrid Goes For A Spin sighed. "It gets a little old, watching her do this over and over. But no. I've got a few more - dare I say - more impressive...well, more \_effective\_ tricks up my sleeve than this."

"Oooh..." Ruffnut had sidled up, grinning widely. "Can you do \_bigger\_ lightning?"

"I dare you to try it," Wordwielder snapped, brushing leaves out of her hair as she landed with as much dignity as possible. "Thor's big shoes to live up to. It could have been better, I'll admit- I totally just made that whole routine up on the spot." She sighed. "Ugh, sorry. I hope I have some Aleve or something in here." She started digging through her bag desperately. "No one saw anything, right?" she asked in an undertone. "She's gone?"

"It'll be okay," Astrid consoled her, "\_As long as you get Hiccup back here, \_\_\*\*now.\*\*\_"



"Oh, that's \_much \_ simpler," Wordwielder said brightly. "May I borrow Meatlug for a moment, Fishlegs?"

"Ah," Fishlegs rasped. "N- no?"

"Great!" She crouched in front of Meatlug. "Almighty girl, it's-" she made a strange half gargling and half screech noise. "As loud as you can."

"Do we really have to do that in the new series?" Astrid sidebarred to Fishlegs. "The dragon calls? I'm sure I read something about it, but-"

He nodded, white in the face at Wordwielder's attention on his dragon.

"Ahhhrgh, \_Dreamworks,\_" groaned Astrid. "Why do you keep storyboarding all this stuff? We could have lived in relatively boring happiness if not for you..."

Meatlug complied after she tossed her a rock to chomp on.

"It was the emergency call Hiccup and I agreed on," Wordwielder explained. "All the dragons know it. It means 'we need backup, pronto.' He should be here soon." Her face darkened. "But if \_she's\_ with him we better be prepared."

"Who is this?" Astrid demanded.

Astrid Goes For A Spin chanced a quick look at Wordwielder, wondering how much she ought to divulge. Wordwielder shrugged carelessly. "A few more axes on our side won't hurt."

"Hiccup has my axe," Astrid hissed. "This is \_part of the problem.\_"

"Oh, Thor, I am so sorry," Wordwielder groaned. "This is all my fault. I should have been more careful. I knew \_she'd\_ find a way to mess it up."

"\_She\_ is...one of our personal enemies," Astrid Goes For A Spin said delicately.

"And she's one of yours too," Wordwielder warned.

"Luckily, our powers of good writing far outweigh her internal evil."

"If \_'she' \_is so terrible, how come I haven't heard of her yet?" Tuffnut challenged. " \_I\_ was kidnapped, as you well know, by some of the very worst we're housing at Berk..."

"Oh, you know her," Wordwielder narrowed her eyes. "Are you familiar with the Skye Flight Saga?"

Astrid clapped her hands over her ears. "I don't want to hear any more!" She cried in horror. "Just kill her already and bring Hiccup back!"

"And deprive Hiccup the pleasure of beheading her himself? I don't think so," Astrid Goes For A Spin scoffed.

"And don't forget Toothless," Wordwielder added. "After the third epic, I wouldn't put it past him to rip her apart piece by piece."

"What's the Skye Flight Saga?" A boy in glasses asked. Ruffnut roared wordlessly in rage, and he shrunk back, cowering.

"Let me tell the tale," Wordwielder sighed. "The author retold the story from the very beginning. Toothless was rescued by Hiccup, as you know, but he was actually a spirit cursed to live forever as a Night Fury."

"The two bonded and fell in love, and Hiccup broke the curse to the point where Toothless could assume human form for a hour at a time," Astrid Goes For A Spin spat. "Which they would always spend doing things not worth naming in all the gory details."

"In the third installment, Toothless and Hiccup married; adopted Astrid's orphaned kid after Snotlout was killed by the Red Death; Toothless sacrificed his life to save Hiccup from the demon that cursed him- oh yes, who was the Red Death. The next installment, currently in progress, has Hiccup in a comatose state so his spirit is in Hel searching for Toothless and a way to save him." She scowled. "There's more, of course. If we don't like it, \_she does it.\_ And oh yes- Astrid, you're represented as Hiccup's first love who died in childbirth after marrying Snotlout."

\*\*\*\*"I know," Astrid moaned, now rocking uncertainly back and forth. "This is why I didn't want you to \_tell\_ everyone about it. It's sick."

"She's got about five thousand reviews, cumulatively," Astrid Goes For A Spin concluded. "Disgusting."

"But, you see," Wordwielder said happily, in a stunning reversal of mood, "We're on the same side, Astrid, you and me. It's just me and Astrid Goes For A Spin and you guys against \_them.\_"

She waved a vague arm at the sky, indicating the world.

There was what appeared to be a flash of lightening, but the accompanying roar confirmed it was Toothless' plasma bolt.

"They're ba-ack," Wordwielder sang.

"I wonder if they got her," Astrid Goes For A Spin murmured, her eyes gleaming.

"She's a slippery one," Wordwielder said sagely. "We tried to suspend her account with the rest, but she was simply too unpredictable to send to Berk. ("Thank you," Snotlout whispered.) And then the lawyer told me I couldn't do that to someone who didn't come. I did anyway. She didn't like that, she did notâ€¦"

"She cracked her way in," Astrid Goes For A Spin grimaced.

"I'm still not sure how," Wordwielder mused. "Cunning

devil."

"Well..." Fishlegs's eyes darted back and forth. "You miiight want to examine that. Don't want - don't want any more of them coming in, am I right? Heh..." He laughed nervously. "Am I right?"

At his tone, Astrid turned, a suspicion suddenly blooming in her mind. "What's her name, again?" she asked Astrid Goes For A Spin innocently.

Somehow, Astrid already knew what she was going to say.

"Jenny," she snarled.

"That's how!" Wordwielder howled. "We had an anomaly with her account in the final check, remember, she had a flag in our evaluation- but I hacked her, it was just minor things-, psych eval was totally normal- dual accounts, she had secret account- a different author ID- I \_knew it couldn't be the software, I knew- but how? She couldn't have done it herself, and it was just us and the gang who had access to the files. Waitâ€|." she paused for a moment and swallowed audibly. "Noâ€|" she gazed up, her eyes brimming with shock. "You couldn't have," she whispered.

The three shared a heavy look, and then Astrid Goes For A Spin tilted her head and spoke. "We've been betrayed," she said softly. "Want to fess up, Fishlegs?"

End  
file.